Action Stories of Every Variety

ARGOSY

ON SALE EVERY WEDNESDAY

MARCH 22

10¢ Canada 15¢

1930

Gone North

Charles Alden Seltzer

Courtney Ryley Cooper

Theodore Roscoe

Erle Stanley Gardner

$2 DOWN

BRAND NEW CORONA GENUINE *Model #3*

Lowest Price — Easiest Terms Ever Offered

HERE's your chance to own that *brand new* Genuine Model 3 Corona you've wanted — on the easiest terms ever offered — at LOWEST PRICE ever offered. Complete in every detail; back spacer, etc., *Manufacturer's Guarantee.* Recognized the world over as the finest, strongest, sturdiest portable built.

Yours for 10 DAYS FREE

Only a limited number of these splendid machines available. To get one, you must act now! Experience the joy of this personal writing portable typewriter can give you! Use it ten days free! See how easy it is to run and the splendidly typed letters it turns out. Ideal for the office desk, home, traveling. Small, compact, light, convenient. Don't send out letters, manuscripts, reports, bills in poor handwriting when you can have this Corona at such a low price on such easy terms. Remember these are *brand new* machines right out of the Corona factory.

Carrying Case FREE
If You Act Now!

Leatheroid carrying case, oiler, instructions, free on this offer. Send no money—just the coupon. Without delay or red tape we will send you the Corona. Try it 10 days. If you decide to keep it, send us only $2—then $3 a month until our special price of $39.90 is paid. Now is the time to buy. Offer may never be repeated.

Save Money—Use this Coupon

Smith Typewriter Sales Corp., (Corona Division)
469 E. Ohio St., Chicago, Ill. Dept. 313

Ship me the Corona, F. O. B. Chicago. On arrival I'll deposit $2 with express agent. If I keep the machine I'll send you $3 a month until the $37.90 balance of $39.90 price is paid; the title to remain with you until then. I am to have 10 days to try the typewriter. If I decide not to keep it, I will repack and return to express agent, who will return my $2. You are to give your standard guarantee.

Name _____

Address _____

Employed by _____

...Raised His Pay $4800* After Reading This Amazing Book Which Is Now *FREE!*

*Based on the combined experiences of F. B. Englehardt, Chattanooga, Tenn.; A. F. Thompson, Sioux City, Iowa; L. D. Mathers, of E. Cleveland, Ohio, and many others.

Caught in a Rut

I wonder I put up with it as long as I did! Every day was filled with nothing but deadly routine and monotonous detail. No freedom or independence. No chance to get out and meet people, travel, nor have interesting experiences. I was just like a cog in a big machine with poor prospects of ever being anything more.

Long, Tiresome Hours

Every hour of the day I was under somebody's supervision. The TIME-CLOCK constantly laid in wait for me—a monument to unfulfilled hopes and dying ambition. Four times a day, promptly on the dot, it hurled its silent challenge at my self-respect, reminding me how unimportant I was and how little I really COUNTED in the business and social world!

Low Pay

Paid just enough to keep going—but never enough to enjoy any of the GOOD things of life every man DESERVES for his family and himself. Always economizing and pinching pennies. Always wondering what I would do if I were laid off or lost my job. Always uncertain and apprehensive of the future.

Desperate

Happened to get a look at the payroll one day and was astonished to see what big salaries went to the sales force. Found that salesman Brown made $200 a week—and Jenkins $275! Would have given my right arm to make money that fast, but never dreamed I had any "gift" for salesmanship.

A Ray of Light

Stumbled across an article on salesmanship in a magazine that evening. Was surprised to discover that salesmen were made and not "born" as I had foolishly believed. Read about a former cowpuncher, Wm. Shore of California, making $525 in one week after learning the ins-and-outs of scientific salesmanship. Decided that if HE could do it, so could I!

The Turning Point

My first step was to write for a certain little book which a famous business genius has called "The MOST AMAZING BOOK EVER PRINTED". It wasn't a very *big* book, but it certainly opened my eyes to things I had never *dreamed* of—and proved the turning point of my entire career!

What I Discovered

Between the pages of this remarkable volume, I discovered hundreds of little known facts and secrets that revealed the REAL TRUTH about the science of selling! It wasn't a bit as I had imagined. I found out that it was governed by simple rules and laws that almost ANY man can master as easily as he learned the alphabet. I even learned how to go about getting into this "highest paid of all professions". I found out exactly how Mark Barichievich of San Francisco was enabled to quit his $8 a week job as a restaurant-worker and start making $125 a week as a salesman; and how C. W. Birmingham of Dayton, Ohio, jumped from $15 a week to $7500 a year—these and *hundreds* of others! It certainly was a revelation!

FREE Employment Service

Furthermore, I discovered that the National Salesmen's Training Association, which published the book, also operates a most effective employment service! Last year they received requests from all over the U. S. and Canada for more than 50,000 salesmen trained by their method. This service is FREE to both members and employers and thousands have secured positions this way!

Making Good At Last!

It didn't take me long to decide to cast my lot with N. S. T. A.—and after a few weeks I had mastered the secrets of Modern Salesmanship during spare time, without losing a day or a dollar from my old job. When I was ready, the Employment Manager found me over a dozen openings to choose from—I selected one which paid me over $70 a week to start!

Was It Worth It?

Today my salary is $4800 greater than ever before! No more punching time-clocks or worrying over dimes and quarters! NOW my services are in REAL DEMAND with bigger prospects for the future than I ever dared HOPE for back in those days when I was just another "name" on a pay-roll!

Get Your Copy FREE

Right now the book—"The Key To Master Salesmanship"—which banished all my fears and troubles and showed me how to get started on the road to success and independence—will be mailed as a gift to any ambitious man, absolutely FREE. And since there is no obligation, why not see for yourself what amazing facts it contains! Just mail the coupon now—for there is no better way in the world to invest a 2-cent stamp! I KNOW!

NATIONAL SALESMEN'S TRAINING ASSOCIATION
Dept. C-752, N. S. T. A. Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

National Salesmen's Training Assn., Dept. C-752, N. S. T. A. Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

Without obligation, please send me a free copy of "The Key To Master Salesmanship."

Name..... Address.....

Town..... State.....

Age..... Occupation.....

ARGOSY

ON SALE EVERY WEDNESDAY

VOLUME 211 | CONTENTS FOR MARCH 22, 1930 | NUMBER 1

SERIALS

Gone North (Six Parts. Part I) . . . . . Charles Alden Seltzer 5
Mystery in the Hudson Bay country

Caged (Four Parts. Part II) . . . . . Courtney Ryley Cooper 63
A drama of New York's East Side

The Radio Gun-Runners (Six Parts. Part V) . . Ralph Milne Farley 97
Into the weird world inside our Earth

John Solomon's Biggest Game (Six Parts. Part VI) . . H. Bedford-Jones 122
With the fate of all Europe the stake

COMPLETE STORIES

Grogan Gets a Shave (Short Story) . . . . . Robert J. Pearsall 25
Fighting fire—and Fate

The Blue Cat of Buddha (Novelette) . . . . . Theodore Roscoe 36
A strangely guarded Siamese treasure

Fall Guy (Short Story) . . . . . Erle Stanley Gardner 83
A whispering tale of a desert queen

The Price of a Ride (Short Story) . . . . . William Corcoran 115
A taxi man plays Nemesis

OTHER FEATURES

COVER DESIGN . . . . . Paul Stahr
One Jackass Over . . . . . Vincent B. Wilson 24
Texas-Shy Bank Bandits . . . . . Clem Yore 62
The Penalty . . . . . James William Fraser 82
A Dye Made from Spiders . . . . . Gerald FitzGerald 114
The Men Who Make The Argosy—CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER . . . 140
Argonotes 141
Looking Ahead! 144

This magazine is on sale every Wednesday throughout the United States and Canada

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, Publisher, 280 Broadway, New York

MESSAGERIES HACHETTE
8, La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C.4

PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE.,
111 Rue Réaumur

WILLIAM T. DEWART, President C. T. DIXON, Vice President

Published weekly and copyright, 1930, by The Frank A. Munsey Company. Single copies, 10 cents; by the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; $7.00 to Canada and Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered. Entered as second-class matter November 28, 1896, at the post-office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879. The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright, and must not be reprinted without the publishers' permission. Title registered in U. S. Patent Office. Copyrighted in Great Britain.

Manuscripts submitted to this Magazine should be accompanied by sufficient postage for their return if found unavailable. The publisher can accept no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.

$100.00 for a Name Perfume AND $25 EXTRA FOR PROMPTNESS

We want a name for our exquisite perfume and we will pay you $125 if you suggest the one selected. Even a name you don't think much of may win. A simple name has as much chance as any other.

Hints: It may be a single word or more than one word. A "coined" word, the name of a flower, like Rose. The name of a place, a Movie Star or any person. Names are almost unlimited. It costs nothing to submit a name. Someone wins $125.00 for a few moments thought—why not you?

Any Simple Name May Win

Send only one suggestion. If anyone submits more than one name, all names sent by that person will be disqualified. The name found most suitable will receive $100 cash. If you send the winning name within 3 days after reading this announcement you get $25 extra for promptness. Contest closes April 30, 1930, and in case of ties, duplicate prizes will be awarded.

We want to hear from you at once. Send your suggestion on any kind of paper. Neatness does not count. No obligation. Nothing else to do. You may win $125.00 for the name you suggest. **Do it today.**

L. M. STONE, 844 W. Adams St. Dept. 91, Chicago

Styled-On-Fifth-Ave.

TIES PAY BIG

MAKE STEADY MONEY

with this great line—the best paying full time or spare time proposition in the country! You collect liberal commissions in advance.

Beautiful Fifth Avenue patterns. Sturdy, long wearing fabrics. Ties to fit every taste. Direct from factory prices. Write for big new Spring Outfit, sent absolutely FREE. Start earning big money immediately.

PUBLIC SERVICE MILLS, INC., 519-K 30th Street, West New York, N. J.
Canadian Agents apply to 110 Dundas St., London, Ontario, Canada.

Learn MECHANICAL DENTISTRY *in 10 Months!*

Men and Women can do this at home in their spare time. As much as $100 weekly and even more is made by trained mechanical dentists. Steady work. Earn big money in a profession. Write for **FREE** particulars about our easy but complete Home Study Course.

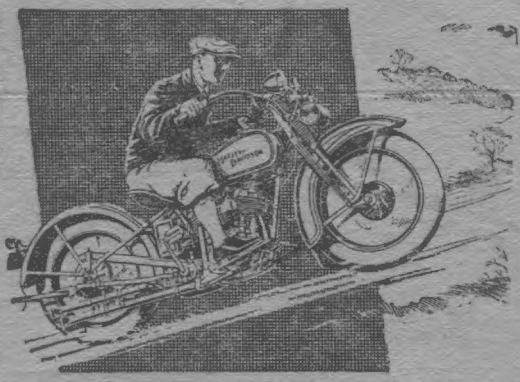
AMERICAN SCHOOL OF MECHANICAL DENTISTRY
Dept. G-2, 150 E. South Temple St., SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

ALL-STORY MAGAZINE

Love Stories of the American Girl

CLEAN
WHOLESOME
GRIPPING

20c *On Sale Every Other Wednesday at All News-stands.* 20c



You Never Tire of It!

EAGER power under instant control — speed that leaves the car-parades behind — lightning response to throttle and brakes — these are just a few of the thousand thrills of motorcycling. Ask any Harley-Davidson rider — he'll tell you of dozens more. They are all yours at low cost, in a Harley-Davidson "45"—the wonderful Twin at a popular price.

Let your dealer show you the 1930 features of this motorcycle — try the comfortable, low-swung saddle — get the "feel" of this wonder Twin. Ask about his Pay-As-You-Ride Plan.

Mail the Coupon!
for literature showing our full line of Singles, Twins, and Sidecars. Motorcycle prices range from $235 f. o. b. factory.

Ride a **HARLEY-DAVIDSON**

HARLEY-DAVIDSON MOTOR COMPANY
Dept. M. G., Milwaukee, Wis.
Interested in your motorcycles. Send literature.

Name.....

Address.....

My age is ☐ 16-19 years, ☐ 20-30 years, ☐ 31 years and up, ☐ under 16 years. Check your age group.

Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rate in The Munsey Combination comprising:

All-Story (Combined with Munsey)
Argosy
Detective Fiction W'kly
Minimum space 4 lines.

Combination Line Rate $3.00 Less 2% cash discount

April 19th Classified Forms Close March 22nd.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

UNUSUAL OPPORTUNITY — $100 WEEKLY SELLING BETTER QUALITY, ALL-WOOL, union-made-to-measure suits and topcoats at $23.50 and $31.50. Build big repeat business. Liberal bonus for producers. Large swatch samples FREE. W. Z. GIBSON, INC., 500 Throop, Dept. Q-409, Chicago.

DO YOU WANT AGENTS AND SALESMEN to sell your merchandise? Men and women who are educated in personal salesmanship and know the house-to-house, office and store canvassing proposition. These advertisers are getting them year in and year out, and there are thousands more for you among the readers of the Munsey Magazines. Our Classified Service Bureau will gladly show you how to use this section most profitably and at the least cost. Write to-day to the CLASSIFIED MANAGER, MUNSEY COMBINATION, 280 Broadway, New York.

STRANGE BATTERY COMPOUND CHARGES INSTANTLY. ELIMINATES OLD METHOD. GIVES NEW LIFE AND PEP. Big profits. Gallon free. LIGHTNING CO., St. Paul, Minn.

REAL ESTATE

BOULDER DAM.
FORTUNES MADE IN CALIFORNIA LAND. Send for booklet "WATER, POWER & WEALTH." It tells all. GANDOLFO & GUSTAD, San Bernardino, Calif.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

MONEY MADE IN MICHIGAN POTATOES. $10 DOWN NOW AND EASY TERMS BUYS LAND NEAR MARKETS, LAKES, STREAMS. WRITE TODAY. SWIGART & CO., M-801, 32 NO. STATE ST. BLDG., CHICAGO.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS. BOOKLET FREE. Highest references. Best results. Promptness assured. Send drawing or model for examination and advice. WATSON E. COLEMAN, Registered Patent Lawyer, 724 Ninth Street, Washington, D. C.

INVENTORS—Write For Our Guide Book, "How To Get Your Patent," and evidence of invention blank. Send model or sketch for Inspection and Instructions Free. Terms reasonable. RANDOLPH & CO., Dept. 412, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS—Write for free guide book, "How To Obtain A Patent" and Record of Invention Blank. Send model or sketch and description of inventions for Free Opinion whether it comes within Patent Office Rules. Easy Payments. VICTOR J. EVANS & CO., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

SONG POEM OR MELODY WRITERS—GET IN TOUCH WITH ME IMMEDIATELY for a bona fide proposition. Investigate now and be thoroughly convinced. RAY HIBBELER, D3, 2104 N. Keystone Ave., Chicago.

EDUCATIONAL

YOU READ THESE LITTLE ADVERTISEMENTS. Perhaps you obtain through them things you want; things you might never have known about if you had not looked here. Did it ever strike you other people would read your message—that they would buy what you have to sell; whether it is a bicycle you no longer need, a patented novelty you desire to push, or maybe your own services? Our Classified Service Bureau will gladly show you how to use this section most profitably and at the least cost. Write to-day to the CLASSIFIED MANAGER, MUNSEY COMBINATION, 280 B'way, N. Y.

Win a Nash Sedan or $2750.00 in Cash

Someone who answers this ad will receive, absolutely free, a fully equipped 7-Passenger, Advanced Six Nash Sedan or its full value in cash ($2,000.00) and $750.00 in cash for promptness. We are also giving away a Dodge Sedan, a Brunswick Phonograph and many other valuable prizes—besides Hundreds of Dollars in Cash for advertising purposes to men, women and children who solve our puzzle and win our prizes. Over $100,000 in Cash and Prizes already given! Mrs. Kate L. Needham won $3,150.00; W. R. Eddington, $3,050.00; Mrs. M. Iverson, $2,320.00. This offer is guaranteed by a big reliable company with a reputation of many years of honest dealings, and is open to anyone living in the U. S. A. outside of Chicago.

Find the Twin Babies

There are eight babies in the picture at left. Two, and only two, are alike. These two are the twins. See if you can find them. The rest are different either in their clothes or in their eyes. When you find the twins, mark them with an "X," tear out the picture and send it to me together with your name and address.

$750.00 Extra for Promptness

In addition to the many valuable prizes and Hundreds of Dollars in Cash we are also giving a Special Added Prize of $750.00 Cash for Promptness to the winner of the Nash Sedan—making a total of $2,750.00 in prizes or cash that you can win. In case of ties duplicate prizes will be awarded each one tying. Solve the puzzle and send it to me right away together with your name and address to qualify for an opportunity to share in the $4,500.00 total Grand Prizes. EVERYBODY PROFITS—you may be the lucky first prize winner. It pays to be prompt.

JOHN T. ADAMS, Manager, Dept. 2833 **323 South Peoria Street, Chicago, Illinois**

In answering any advertisement on this page it is desirable that you mention this magazine.

ARGOSY

ON SALE EVERY WEDNESDAY

VOLUME 211 SATURDAY, MARCH 22, 1930 NUMBER 1

Fallon's attacker, unconscious, tumbled over the steamer rail

Gone North

When Jim Fallon started for the Hudson Bay country, he wasn't sure whether he was on a man-hunt or a wild goose chase—but he found his quest was fraught with real enough peril

By CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

Author of "Man-Hunt," "The Raider," etc.

CHAPTER I.

CLUMSY SPIES.

STANDING at the edge of the rotting wharf at Grand Marias, Jim Fallon filled his lungs with the sweet aroma of pine and spruce and cedar. East and west were long timbered shore lines stretching into the Northland, and at his feet were the chopping blue waters of Lake Winnipeg. Lashed to the edge of the wharf was the little wood-burning steamer that was to take him northward to Ross Island. His luggage was aboard and he was idling until sailing time.

The stifling cities of the States were behind Fallon. Now, as he leaned against the steady breeze that swept down upon him from the Northland, he felt new strength flowing into his muscular body. He drew his breath deeply and his blue eyes were eager.

On the last lap of the train trip to Grand Marias he had been aware of the guarded and seemingly hostile scrutiny of a good-looking young woman who sat across the aisle.

It left him slightly derisive. If she had any hope of his attempting to meet her gaze, she was wasting her time; for he had never had any enthusiasm over women who made a practice of hunting men. He did his own hunting, among women as well as in the wilderness fastnesses, and his fancy might lead him anywhere.

He had spent some years of his youth in the West—New Mexico, Arizona, Texas. He had punched cows in Wyoming and Montana; he had hunted gold in California and the Yukon, and as yet no pretty face had stirred in him more than a passing interest.

He had not spoken to the woman, when a few minutes ago he had passed her at the farther end of the wharf. He had pretended not to see her, though he had been aware that her gaze had followed him.

He deliberately turned his back to her and devoted his attention to a scrutiny of the country. Timber; tundra with its rank growth of lichen and mosses; muskeg belts with their tall spears of marsh reeds; rolling hills and ridges; and an all-pervading atmosphere of somewhat mournful solemnity. It was enough to satisfy him. Space and silence, with adventure always lurking beyond the crest of the next ridge of land.

He heard a light step on the planking behind him, and was both amazed and amused when the woman stepped to within a few feet of him and addressed him.

"It *is* rather pretty, isn't it?"

Remembering her previous hostility, he glanced around curiously, certain that she had been speaking to some one near him. But the woman and himself were the only occupants of the wharf.

He looked at her, doffed his cap, and quietly agreed with her that the country was pretty.

The graceful lines of her figure were seductively emphasized by her short skirt and the light-weight checkered mackinaw. But she had passed her girlhood. Her complexion, the firmly rounded chin and throat, the mass of dusky golden hair, her general appearance, had misled him. Her eyes betrayed her.

Ingenuous as she sought to make them she did not quite succeed in creating in him the illusion that their owner was a frank, candid, guileless girl. Experience, sophistication, knowledge, lurked in their depths. And although Fallon was a gallant gentleman even with women he did not respect, there was a glint of cynicism in his eyes as he met her gaze.

"Is it always this pretty?" she asked. She was looking at his broad shoulders as she spoke and he got the impression that she was estimating his physical strength. Why?

"Not always," he answered. "Not in the fall or the winter or the early spring. Just now it is in a gracious mood. It is like a woman's smile—not to be depended upon."

"My! I thought all sons of the wilderness were gallant! I find you are cynical. But—you know this

country? You have been here before?"

"No."

HE looked past her at the long, low rambling frame building which was used as a railway and steamboat station, storage house, freight depot. Boxes, crates, canoes, bales of goods, fishing nets and poles, were piled here and there in bundles, mounds and monuments. Above the building flew the red cross and caribou flag of a trading post.

From the door issued the indescribable odor of blending aromas from numerous unpacked food supplies. And in the doorway, which was wide and low, were two men who had ridden from Saint Boniface with the woman and Fallon. They had followed her into the train at Saint Boniface, and several times he had seen them together, talking. He had assumed they were friends, and now he was wondering why the woman did not join them instead of forcing herself upon him.

As Fallon glanced at them they were joined by the post trader, a squat, broad Scotchman in his shirt sleeves. He was hatless and was smoking a short-stemmed pipe.

The post trader was talking with one of the two men. The other, big, broad of shoulder and slender of waist, with arms and thighs so muscular that they bulged the sleeves of his mackinaw and the legs of his trousers, was leaning against the edge of the doorway, apart from his companion and the trader. He appeared to be staring at the planks of the wharf. But Fallon observed that he was in reality watching the girl and himself.

"You are the sort of man that likes adventure," she said.

Fallon looked again at the big man in the doorway and his lips curved slightly with contempt.

The woman did not see the smile. "Are you going far?"

He knew that if the two men and the woman were taking the steamer they would be aware when he left it. And so there was little to be gained by lying.

"Not far," he said. "I leave the steamer at Ross Island. After that I don't know."

"Have you friends at Ross Island?"

"Not a friend that I know of."

The woman smiled, but Fallon could see that she was vexed by his evasion of her questions, and perhaps by the fact that she was making no impression upon him. He might now have asked her some questions in return, but he resisted the impulse. If she and the men were what he thought, he could conduct his work more successfully by counterfeiting disinterest in their movements and by convincing them that his presence in the wilderness was purposeless.

The woman tapped the wharf with a small booted foot, and Fallon thought she was through with him. But no. She looked up at him again.

"They have some strange tales and legends in this country," she said. "I have heard several. Tales of great wolves—from the Barrens, I think; tribal superstitions that seem very ridiculous; stories of travelers that have disappeared; of fabulous mines that exist only until they are searched for. Coming up here on the train I was told a story about a gold mine so rich that it would make Midas envious. Do you think there is gold in this part of the country?"

"There are always rumors. I know of no great gold discoveries in this part of the country. Midas, eh? Well,

Midas went out of business after the Yukon."

"You have been in the Yukon country?" She tried so carefully to conceal her eagerness.

He answered dryly: "A great many people were there."

"But you?"

He lied, shaking his head negatively.

She made a great effort to conceal her chagrin at his evasions.

"Perhaps I shall see you again, on the steamer," she said. "We are going to Ross Island, too."

She turned, left him.

FALLON walked to the farther end of the wharf. He was no longer amused. He saw the woman join the two men and walk slowly away from the building, the woman between the two men.

He wondered at the awkwardness of their methods. Obviously, they were novices. But there was earnestness in their manner, the tension of passion.

They went to the end of the wharf, away from Fallon. There they paused and the big man spoke to the woman. His voice was eager, vibrant.

"Well?" he said.

The woman's eyes were flashing with impotent rage. She clenched her hands and stood rigid. Her voice was harsh.

"It's no use."

"Not a word, eh?" said the big man. He grinned wryly and his lips curved back from his teeth. "Well, what did I tell you? It was a mistake to try to quiz him at all. We've put him next, now. Ever since we spotted him at Saint Boniface I've been trying to place him. I've got him now. It was the last grin he gave you. I'd seen it before. I saw it on his lips one night in a saloon in Dawson, when he made a gambler eat his gun. He's Jim Fallon!"

The other man started; his muscles seemed to leap and writhe. Then, his face paling, he stared disgustedly into the faces of his companions.

He cursed. "What a break! Another six months with no interference, and we'd have made the grade. If that man is all I've heard he is I'd rather have a fiend from hell on my trail!"

CHAPTER II.

THE SHADOW OF A CLUB.

THE little steamer was a flat-bottomed freighter, and there were no passengers aboard except the two men and the woman and Fallon when shortly before midnight she slipped away from the wharf and turned her prow northward to buck a stiff quartering head wind. Fallon alone kept the deck, to watch a white, brilliant moon rise and bathe the world with its magic, silver light.

The shore line slipped by. Beyond it stretched the wilderness, serene and calm, masking its dangers and hazards with the soft, hazy veil of distance; an empire of the wild.

This was the first time that Fallon had visited the Hudson Bay country, but from fellow travelers and adventurers on the rim of the Arctic Circle he had listened to tales that he had remembered; and in the office of a mining company in Montana he had listened to still another tale. A tale that was unforgetable, for the reason that weaving through it was a father's concern and affection for a son.

William J. Underhill, the mine owner, had a large tract of timber land along the Hayes River near Hudson Bay. Almost a year ago he had sent his twenty-five-year-old son, Linton Underhill, to look over the country.

"He wrote me from Selkirk that he had bought an outfit and engaged a guide," Underhill told Fallon. "The guide was a Chippewa Indian named 'Jackwoon.' Lin was starting right away. That was about a year ago.

"I didn't hear from him again. At first I thought he was in the wilderness and couldn't get to a post to get a letter out. After he had been gone about six months I made inquiries. The day my letter reached the post trader at Selkirk, the trader got word that the Indian guide had reported that Lin had disappeared.

"I've had a report from the police up there. The guide couldn't account for Lin's disappearance. He'd left a note for Jackwoon at a camp they had on the Shamattawa River near Merry Lake. I've got the note here."

He showed Fallon a piece of paper upon which were written, in pencil, the words:

JACK:
I am going north for a few days.
Wait.

"There was no signature. But that's Lin's writing," resumed Underhill. "Naturally, there being only himself and the guide, he wouldn't bother to sign the note. Jackwoon told the police he had waited at the camp for two weeks, and when Lin didn't show up he worked back to the Hayes, trying to trail him. He couldn't find any trace of Lin.

"There's a man named Randall up there. He has built himself a big stone house in the wilderness north of the Hayes. He's a crank, I think; he must be, to build a house up there. He's wealthy, has big timber holdings north of the Hayes. The police reported that Randall had hired several outfits of Indian guides and runners to comb the country for Lin. The police and Randall and Lin's guide, Jackwoon, seem to have done all that can be done. But I am not satisfied. I feel that if I don't keep on trying to find Lin I won't be doing my duty as a father.

"And so I sent for you. If there's any man in the world who can find Lin, alive or dead, you are the man. Brave men, who do not know what defeat is, have recommended you. I wanted to have the best. Fallon, it isn't a question of money with you, I know, for you've all you need of that. I am told you take long chances because you like to match your wits and your courage and your muscle against conditions that seem to promise certain defeat.

"If I were thirty years younger I'd go up there myself. I know it's asking more than one man should ask of another, and I won't blame you a bit for refusing. But think it over, Fallon."

"I'm leaving to-night," was Fallon's reply. "I've wanted to take a look at that country, anyway, and this is as good a reason for going as any I can think of. But don't expect too much of me, Underhill. I'm vastly overrated. I've been lucky in pulling off three or four things that seemed to be difficult, to outsiders. They were actually rather simple. I'll go up there, but I won't promise how long I'll stay or what I shall do."

THAT conversation had taken place a little more than two weeks ago. In a pocket of Fallon's coat was a picture of Lin Underhill, and the note he had written to Jackwoon, the guide. The elder Underhill had wired Angus Mackenzie, the post trader at Grand Marias, to send Indian runners into the wilderness to search for Jackwoon and bring him back to Rossville to meet Fallon there.

Fallon refilled his pipe.

When he had been listening to Underhill in the latter's office in Montana he had been convinced that he was setting out on a hopeless quest. Linton Underhill had done a foolish thing in deserting his guide. The solution of the tragedy appeared to be simple. Lin, lost in the wilderness, had fallen victim to starvation, or wild animals, or one of the many savage nomadic tribes of Indians. Or he might have wandered into the muskeg to drown. There were many other ways in which a man might lose his life. A false step, a sudden illness, insanity.

But now Fallon was revising his convictions, for he knew that his meeting with the woman had not been casual or accidental. The big man, Fallon was certain, had urged the meeting. His lips curved cynically around the stem of his pipe. The big man's intelligence was not amazingly keen.

Did they have any inkling of his intentions? If so, was Lin Underhill alive and held prisoner somewhere in the north country? Yet, what reason could any one have for holding him in captivity? The elder Underhill had offered no reward for Lin, nor had he received a demand for ransom. Now, having knocked the ashes from his pipe, he remembered that the woman had mentioned a gold mine. "A gold mine so rich that it would make Midas envious," she had said.

Was that the explanation—that they had discovered a mine and were afraid he had come north after it? Well, they would be relieved when they saw him leave the boat at Rossville and head eastward through the chain of lakes that led to the Hayes!

He got up and leaned against the rail while he watched the moonlight gleaming upon the water. As he put his pipe into a pocket he observed his shadow on the surface of the water and realized that it was past midnight. The moon was behind him, and the moonlight was so bright that he could even see the reflection of the boat's rail half a dozen feet out from the side.

And then, still gazing into the water, he saw another shadow join his on the surface—the shadow of a big man with broad shoulders.

He did not turn; he gave no sign that he knew the big man had come close to him. But when he saw an arm upraised in the shadow on the surface of the water he moved like a flash to the right and heard a club smash to splinters on the rail at the exact spot where his head would have been if he had not moved.

The weight of his body was on his toes as he ducked and slipped away. His lithe muscles were rippling with eagerness. He heard the shattered club splash into the water, and he saw the big man of the Grand Marias wharf plunge against the rail, momentarily off balance as his blow missed. The big man swung erect, amazed and uncertain. And in that instant Fallon flashed forward and swung his right arm in a full arc, pivoting in order to get into the blow the leverage of his body.

The fist landed with a splintering crash not unlike that which had been made by the club striking the rail, and the big man reeled backward with sagging knees.

Fallon was after him relentlessly. The thud and jar of the blows that landed on the big man's face could be heard above the throbbing of the engine. He was knocked hither and yon until he landed against the rail. He struck the rail with his hips. If he had been conscious he might

now have grasped the rail and saved himself from the disaster that followed. But his body was limp and his brain deadened, and so he toppled backward and slid with a heavy splash into the water.

AS the big man fell, another figure launched itself from the shadows of the deck house. It was not a club, but a knife, this time—for the blade rang on the deck as the man reeled along the rail from the effects of Fallon's smashing blow.

This man was smaller than the first, and only one blow was necessary. He fell, face down, on the deck near the rail. Fallon lifted him, swung him aloft and heaved him over the side, to join his companion.

It had been fast work, and Fallon stood at the rail, breathing deeply. He could see both men in the rippling, moonlit water. The shock had revived them and they were both swimming, a little astern. Fallon grimly watched them, but made no effort to help them. They needed something more cleansing than water, but for the present water would suffice.

And now came a voice from somewhere in the shadows of the deck house near the windward rail, crying hoarsely that there was a man overboard.

A bell rang, the noisy engine ceased throbbing. A man leaped from the wheel house, another came from the shadows of the deck house, the engineer emerged from his shallow hold and helped the others launch a small boat.

The victims of Fallon's smashing punches were far astern now, and were filling the night with their cries for help. Fallon watched the boat approach them; saw them pulled to safety. Then he left the rail and went to his room, first picking up the knife and balancing it in his hand.

"Gold, eh?" he said, speculatively. "Well, yes; I've known of gold doing that to men."

CHAPTER III.

BETRAYAL.

FOR perhaps an hour after Fallon stretched himself out in his bunk he was lying there trying to link his fragmentary thoughts into a direct chain of reasoning regarding the attack that had been made upon him.

The mere guess that he might be interested in a gold mine was too flimsy a structure upon which to base a murderous attack with a club and a knife.

He could not figure it out. The sensation of pleasant warmth that precedes sleep was stealing over him when he heard a voice coming into his berth from the half-open window.

The voice was low and guarded. It was pitched to harmonize with the whispering breeze and the soft moonlight.

"You saw it, eh?" said the voice.

"Saw it when it started," returned another voice. "I was stretched out on a bale of goods on the after deck house when I saw the big man—his name is Blandin—with a stick of timber, at least three inches thick. I was just opening my mouth to yell when Fallon ducked and smashed him. I never saw a man put so much steam into his punches.

"Soon as Fallon hit Blandin this other fellow, Kelso, rushed in. He dropped like a bag of meal. And then this Fallon picked him up like he was lifting a baby and heaved him over the side after Blandin. Seems Fallon

was kind of stirred up over the way they'd come at him."

"Should think he would be," came the reply. "Fallon, you say his name is. Not Jim Fallon—the Klondike Fallon?"

"That's him. You've heard of him, eh?"

"Heard of him?" The voice was derisive. "Who hasn't heard of Klondike Fallon? He's one of the coolest and nerviest dare-devils that ever drove a dog team near the Circle. So he handled Kelso like he was handling a baby, eh? He could do that. There's tales about his strength. Dead shot. A wizard with a knife. Can wear out half a dozen men on a trail. So that's Fallon, is it? Who has been telling you?"

"Angus Mackenzie. That Underhill man sent Fallon up here to find his boy."

"What about Blandin and Kelso and this woman; did old Angus tell you anything about them?"

"Only their names. The woman's named Devake. I heard Blandin call her Blanche."

"Sounds like a stage name. She—well, she ain't just the sort a man marries, is she?"

Both men laughed.

They were silent for a time and then one of them said:

"What do you suppose Fallon will do about them trying to murder him?"

"He won't do anything. As far as he's concerned, that affair is ended. Would you expect him to go to the police? Fallon ain't that kind. Whatever is done he will do himself."

The remainder of their conversation was not interesting to Fallon, though he went to sleep hearing their voices. After breakfast the next morning he went aft to smoke. The steamer was slow, but the shore astern had vanished. A brassy sun swam in a white sky and the wind had died. They went serenely past little timber-clad islands which were supremely calm and peaceful in their isolation; past wooded points that were boldly thrust out from the mainland. Bays, inlets, miles of marsh, rocky cliffs and timber-studded shore line came up, were passed and left behind.

There was a sameness in the landscape, and the atmosphere brought to one a sensation of vague and indefinable perturbation, as if the distances were immeasurable, and held elements that were mocking and waiting for an opportunity to pounce.

This spell that seized man was his dread and fear of the unknown. It pursues all men who thread the northern wilderness. It is the muted voice of the wild.

FOR perhaps an hour he sat there staring at the vessel's wake. Then he looked up to see the woman moving along the deck toward him. Her face was flushed, but her gaze was direct and defiant.

Fallon lifted his cap.

"Good morning, Miss Devake," he said.

"How did you learn my name?" she asked.

"I do not remember. It seems to me that you must have given it to me yesterday, on the wharf at Grand Marias."

"You are mistaken."

She had regained her poise. She was tranquil and serene, outwardly at least; and to Fallon, considering what had happened during the night, her manner proved that she was an adversary to be respected. The cool audacity lurking

in the depths of her eyes as she faced him stirred him to something like wonder. Only a woman could have presented such self-control to an enemy. A man would have betrayed his feelings in some way.

"I must have learned it some way."

"We are even there, at least," she retorted coolly. "I know yours. You are Jim Fallon—Klondike Falfon."

"You got that from Mackenzie, eh?" He smiled at her. "You knew my name while you were trying to pump me."

"No. To tell the truth, I had an idea you were a greenhorn who had come up here to blunder into other people's business—until we pumped old Angus Mackenzie. Old man Underhill sent you up here to search for his missing son."

Fallon was silent. It would have been better if his mission could have been kept secret.

"You are a good man, Fallon," she resumed. "You are brave and resourceful and strong." A smile, reluctantly admiring and perhaps a bit wistful, tugged at her lips as she pronounced the final word, giving it emphasis by lingering upon it slightly.

"Then you heard of the midnight bathing incident," Fallon interjected.

"That was a mistake," she said. "I warned them not to try it. But they were determined. They insisted it was the only way to get rid of you."

"Attempted m u r d e r. And you made no effort to stop them. What's the meaning of it all? What do you care about young Underhill? If he's alive, why don't you let him communicate with his father? The man is frantic. If you've got him, why don't you set a price on him? Why all the mystery?"

She shook her head unsmilingly.

"You are smart, Fallon," she said. "But that is not the right way to get at it."

"PERHAPS not. But you certainly knew that if I were wiped out, Underhill would make at least one more search for the boy, and that he'd find some man who would be willing to do it."

"He'll not find another Jim Fallon."

"He doesn't need to. Jim Fallon is here."

"Yes," she said wryly, "we know it. But suppose Jim Fallon should spend two or three months up here minding his own business, and then would go back to Underhill and tell him that the search had been fruitless. And suppose that merely upon Jim Fallon's word that he would spend two or three perfectly idle months up here he would one day mysteriously receive fifty thousand dollars. Would that have any effect upon Jim Fallon?"

"It wouldn't thrill me at all, Blanche," he returned. He smiled at her. "It must be a big thing if you can offer fifty thousand."

"It's too big to lose, Fallon. And I warn you that we won't be interfered with. You don't know the country into which you are going. We do. They'll have a thousand chances to murder you, and they'll do it."

"I suppose I ought to thank you for warning me." He looked at her appraisingly, curiously. "Why did you warn me?" he added.

To his amazement he saw a flood of color steal up her neck and quickly diffuse itself over her cheeks and temples. She fought it, but in vain. Her eyes flashed and her lips curved with disdain and contempt. But the telltale color still flamed under the rouge.

"I've warned you because I hate you, Fallon!" she declared derisively.

She turned and walked rapidly away, leaving Fallon to stare into the empty distance while he meditated upon the inconsistencies of her sex.

He knew that she had developed some sort of a sentiment for him, despite the fact that he had not encouraged it; and he was now able to explain the hostility she had exhibited toward him in the beginning. She had then suspected him of prospective interference in her projects, but had instantly been attracted to him, and the hostility had been provoked by a fear that she would ultimately surrender to him, as women of her type have surrendered for hundreds of generations—as she had almost surendered while standing there upon the deck.

Fallon's face grew long, for he had no desire to profit by a woman's weakness. But there it was—the revelation of their complicity. Either Lin Underhill had been murdered by these people and they were trying to keep the authorities from getting evidence that would convict them, or Lin was alive and they were holding him for some purpose which had not yet been revealed or suspected.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CHIPPEWA GUIDE.

THE little steamer nosed her prow, shortly after dawn of the second morning, into the log wharf at Rossville.

Upon all sides and reaching into the far distances, the scene upon which Fallon gazed would be a thousand times duplicated. Lakes and streams glittering like mirrors of steel, ranges of wooded hills, marshes and barrens, ranged away into immeasurable and incomprehensible space.

Blandin and Kelso and Blanche Devake were not to be seen, and Fallon suspected they were deliberately delaying their appearance until he should get out of the way, in the fear that he meant to report their attack upon him, but he had no such intention. He saw to the unloading of his dunnage, piled it against the wall of the trading post building, and sought the trader, Landieu, who had been standing in the doorway watching the steamer dock.

Landieu was tall, slender, courteous; and under his silken, graying mustache his white teeth gleamed as he smiled at Fallon.

Fallon returned the smile. He liked the trader, instantly. The man was a gentleman. He was quiet, slow of speech, and there was a manner about him that could not be acquired in one generation, but had to be inherited. Also, he was blessed with an intellect, for his fine, keen eyes had that knowing, confident gleam which is absent in the eyes of fools.

"You are Monsieur Fallon, of course. We have followed instructions. Jackwoon is here."

"Thank you, *monsieur*. Did your runners have trouble in locating him?"

"They do not say. But Jackwoon is here. Trouble, *m'sieur*, is not to be considered when a thing is to be done."

"Good. Monsieur Landieu has had experience."

"Monsieur Fallon has had experience, also. Great experience. Otherwise he would not be thinking of entering three hundred miles of the most terrible wilderness in the world."

"Jackwoon knows the country?"

Landieu shrugged his shoulders and smiled deprecatingly.

"Jackwoon is an Indian. What

does he know? Who can tell? He was born on the Nelson. He is a Chippewa; he has a reputation. But what can be assured from that? He has been faithful, until—". He paused, smiled.

"Until Lin Underhill," said Fallon.

"Yes." Landieu watched the door, apparently fearful that his words would be overheard. His voice sank almost to a whisper.

"The young Underhill was with Jackwoon. *Pouf!* He vanishes! The note says he has gone north. Where? What is there in the north? Jackwoon knows the woods—every stream and river and lake, and every game trail. He can track the wolf and the lynx, and yet he cannot track a greenhorn, who would leave more signs than the moose. *M'sieur,* I feel there is something."

Fallon's brows drew together, but he said nothing. It had been at his suggestion that the elder Underhill had caused runners to be started into the wilderness to search for Jackwoon. He wanted Jackwoon to guide him down the Hayes, over the same trail that he had taken Lin Underhill. He wanted to watch Jackwoon; wanted to observe his movements, wanted to study him. He, too, had been suspicious of the Indian.

But Fallon was not thinking of taking any one into his confidence, not even Landieu.

HE made some inquiries about the country, about supplies. Then he walked to the door of the post building, leaned against one of the jambs and watched the gangplank of the steamer.

Blanche Devake and Kelso and Blandin were stepping down to the wharf. The woman came first, and for an instant her gaze met Fallon's. She gave no indication that she had seen him.

Blandin descended. His lips were swollen grotesquely, and his eyes were sullen as he caught sight of Fallon, though Fallon stared past him. Kelso's eyes were purple and puffed, and almost closed. He did not look at Fallon, but bent his head and pretended to be interested in the luggage that was piled on the wharf near him.

The three were on the wharf only a few minutes. They presently moved off and Fallon saw them walking toward a hut near which half a dozen dogs were snarling and fighting.

"*Sacré nom!*" ejaculated Landieu, at Fallon's shoulder. "*M'sieur* is not fastidious about his fellow-travelers!"

"You know them, eh?" said Fallon.

"They have been here before, *m'sieur.* Once last year, and once before, this year. They go east, to the Randall château."

Fallon's eyelashes flickered and the keen-eyed post trader smiled.

"*M'sieur* has heard of the stone château?"

"It has been mentioned in my presence."

"*M'sieur* is discreet," said Landieu. "It is well. They go down the Hayes, also, *m'sieur.*"

"Friends of Randall?"

"Ah! I do not know. One supposes they are friends or they would not visit so often. But does it not make one wonder at Monsieur Randall, that he should have such friends?"

"Randall has a good reputation?"

"The best. That is what makes it strange."

Landieu did not add to this, so Fallon inquired about Jackwoon.

The Indian, sitting on the edge of the low wharf, was pointed out to him. Jackwoon appeared to be indifferent to

his surroundings. His legs were dangling over the edge of the wharf, and he was hunched up, smoking a short-stemmed pipe.

Landieu hailed him, telling him to come and meet the man who had engaged his services, and Jackwoon, civil and quiet, and deliberate of movement, approached and was introduced to Fallon.

Jackwoon was short and heavy. He was not fat, but muscular. There was strength in his broad shoulders and in his thick arms and wrists. His face was broad, his forehead low, and his straight black hair was smoothed and greased so that it emphasized the flatness of his head. His nose was big. His eyes, black, lambent, sly, met Fallon's briefly. His lips smiled shallowly.

"WHERE M'sieur Fallon go?" he asked, employing the macaronic jargon in which alone it is possible for the Indian and white man to converse.

"Down the Hayes."

"How far go?"

The black eyes darted a glance into Fallon's—a probing, searching glance which would perhaps enable him to discover something about the character of the big white man who had sought him out.

What Jackwoon saw was a pair of steady blue eyes which were entirely lacking in warmth. Whatever was in them was not for Jackwoon to see; a baffling vacuity which could not be penetrated or analyzed. There was no antagonism, no friendliness, no emotion whatever in them.

Jackwoon's gaze wavered, drooped.

"To where you lost Underhill," said Fallon. "How far is that?"

"Ten sleep, mebbe." He smiled apologetically. "Jackwoon good guide. Underhill man know too much—no listen."

"All right," said Fallon. "Where is your canoe?"

Jackwoon pointed to a sloping, stony beach where a light canoe was drawn up, and then stood listening while Fallon bought a second canoe from Landieu.

"All right, Jackwoon; we'll split the load," said Fallon. He strode to where his dunnage was piled, separated it and pointed to the portion the guide was to take.

"You go now?" questioned the latter. "You got grub?"

"Right away."

Landieu slid out a canoe equipped with paddle and pole, and then went inside with Fallon, where the food supply was selected and packed.

An hour later Jackwoon, somewhat reluctantly, it seemed, pushed off in his canoe and deftly swept it outward from the shore, where he permitted the craft to float idly in the current while he watched Fallon. His face was inscrutable, but his eyes quickened when he observed that the white man's movements were as certain and definite as his own.

A wave of the hand by Fallon, a low "*Le Bon Dieu* be with you," from Landieu standing on the wharf, and they were off, with Jackwoon heading his craft straight down the channel toward the vast wilderness beyond.

As the paddles flashed in the bright sunlight, smoothly slipping in and out of the mirror-like surface of the water, Landieu turned and gazed back toward the land.

In front of the hut to which they had gone directly after leaving the steamer, stood Blandin, Kelso and Blanche Devake.

They were watching Jackwoon and

Fallon, who were already far down the channel.

CHAPTER V.

A TRAP FOR A LIAR.

JACKWOON paddled steadily, driving his canoe ahead with slow, graceful sweeping strokes that sent the light craft skittering over the water like a dry leaf in a breeze. The Indian did not look back.

A hundred yards behind came Fallon's canoe, handled as capably as the Indian's. There was seemingly no effort in Fallon's movements—in his sliding, dipping, deftly-turned strokes that created only a gently swirling eddy on the surface of the water.

Jackwoon's failure to glance back was significant. It told Fallon that already the Indian had appraised him and had decided he was experienced. If he had betrayed awkwardness in getting his canoe off, or if his handling of the paddle had revealed lack of skill, Jackwoon would have shown some interest in him.

Rossville was the last settlement they would encounter until they reached Hudson Bay—if they went that far. On some far waterway there might be a trading post, but if there was, Fallon had no knowledge of it. And when they had traveled three or four miles down the channel a jutting shoulder of the mainland shut Rossville from their view and they were in the wilderness.

They went on, skimming the mirror-like surface of the water, past innumerable small timbered islands. At noon they were on the slender stream that connects the channel with Pipestone Lake, and at dusk the keels of their canoes grated slightly on the pebbly gravel and sand of a small midstream island which was featured by ice-polished bowlders and tufts of black willow.

It was Fallon who selected the island as a camping place for the night. Jackwoon had mutely pointed to a sloping beach on the mainland southward, but Fallon had shaken his head in dissent.

The canoes were beached and the cargo unpacked. Jackwoon soon had a fire going, and while he was engaged in cooking supper Fallon inspected the island, which was an oblong piece of land about a hundred yards wide at its broadest part and probably two hundred yards long.

There was little current in the river; the water was smooth and glassy, and the silence sepulchral. After supper Fallon stretched himself on a rock near the fire and smoked. Jackwoon, having washed the cooking utensils and restored them to their bag, was squatted near the fire. He also was smoking, and his wide, flat face was expressionless.

All day Fallon had studied the Indian; and now, across the fire, he was again attempting to solve the enigma of the man's character.

He knew, however, that he had made little progress. Innocent or guilty, noble or ignoble, the Indian masks his feelings with a stoic indifference which is not to be penetrated. Whatever Jackwoon knew about the disappearance of Lin Underhill he would keep to himself. He would evade straight or direct questions and he would not be trapped by oblique ones.

And yet one thing had Fallon observed, and he got a malicious satisfaction out of the knowledge: Jackwoon was uncomfortable in his presence. His attempts to conceal the fact only resulted in making his condition more

apparent to the observing eyes that watched him.

So far, Fallon had not spoken a dozen words to Jackwoon, and he did not speak now as he smoked and studied the Indian's face, which was illumined by the ruddy glow of the fire. But Jackwoon was aware that he was being watched, and he was uneasy.

AN hour passed. Fallon had not moved except to refill his pipe. Jackwoon still squatted near the fire, which he replenished from time to time.

The darkness deepened; the white light in the north sank close to the horizon. Reddish-tinted stars came out; the black forests on all sides grew to a denser black and seemed to creep nearer. A lynx screamed like a woman being subjected to excruciating torture. A wolf howled.

Jackwoon had been uncomfortable all day, with the knowledge that the keen-eyed white man had been watching him. Most white men who had come under Jackwoon's observation talked more or less. This man—this Fallon—did not talk except when he gave orders. He was lying on the rock now, staring. Jackwoon did not look at him, but he could feel Fallon's gaze; and he knew that if he looked up now Fallon's cold, steady gaze would be fixed upon him.

A strange man, Fallon. The primitive mind of the Indian was awed by the power and force he felt in this white man. He grew more uneasy.

And then, like a whisper, low and gentle, it came—Fallon's voice:

"Was Underhill a good man?"

"Um. Him good man. But him know too much. Go 'lone. Not know country."

"You were in camp?"

"Yes. One sleep."

"Underhill leave at night?"

"In morning. We want meat. I go hunt. Come back noon—him gone."

"Which way?"

"Him go north."

"Where was the camp?"

"On Shamattawa. Merry Lake."

"Where had you been?"

"Come back from south."

"Where were you going?"

"To Hayes River. Fox River, mebbe. Underhill say look for more timber."

"Meet anybody? White man—Indian?"

"Indian—one time, two time. Know 'em."

"No white men?"

Jackwoon's answers had up to this time been given instantly. Now he hesitated. The hesitation was only momentary, but it was enough to convince Fallon that the Indian was considering his answer.

"No white men. Indian; Cree."

"Underhill good hunter?"

"Him no hunt."

"Carry rifle?"

"In canoe. Carry on portage."

"How do you know he went north?"

"Find tracks."

"How far from Shamattawa to Hayes?"

"Seventy, eighty mile."

"Underhill take grub?"

Jackwoon shook his head negatively.

"Take rifle?"

"Him take rifle. Go hunt, mebbe. Get lost. Mebbe no grub for week or two. Him no good shoot."

"You saw him shoot?"

"Him shoot at deer. So times." Jackwoon held up his hand and separated the fingers until he had counted four. "No hittum," he added.

"He load rifle again after he missed the deer?"

"Him rifle always loaded."

"How far did you track him?"

"Lose him ten, fi'teen mile. Big rain. Go north, anyway. No find. Me go Fox River, to Randall. Big hunt—Randall, Indian. No find. Go back to canoe—to Landieu. Give Landieu Underhill man stuff. Talk police. Underhill man lost. No find."

"Too bad," said Fallon. He was silent for a time. The fire grew low, its light dimmed. Then suddenly, from the darkness of the rock Fallon fired another question—sharp, stern:

"What did Blandin say?"

In the dying firelight Fallon saw the stoic calm of Jackwoon's face disturbed by a quick tightening of the lips. He was startled. He spoke hesitatingly.

"Blandin say Underhill man—" He paused, his face grew blank. He shook his head with a violent negative. "Jackwoon not know Blandin man. Mebbe see; not know."

"What did Blandin say?"

"Say Underhill man lost, mebbe."

"Who did he say that to?"

"Randall, mebbe. Hear him say. Forget."

"At Randall's place?"

Jackwoon shook his head. "No can think."

"Blandin was up here last year. You see him?"

"See um, mebbe. No talk um."

"Blandin had a guide?"

"Ugh. Kumwa—him Cree. More." Jackwoon held up four fingers.

Fallon did not ask any more questions. He now knew that the Indian had been implicated in the disappearance of Lin Underhill, but he had been instructed, perhaps bribed, to pretend ignorance.

There had been the stupefied expression of the Indian's face when he realized that he had committed himself about Blandin. Moreover, there was something that Fallon had not mentioned to Jackwoon. Fallon had examined the effects belonging to Lin Underhill, and had found two hundred rifle cartridges. The boxes containing them were unbroken. And Laudieu's itemized list of the supplies bought by Lin revealed that only two hundred cartridges had been purchased.

Lin's gun was of heavier caliber than Jackwoon's, and so obviously Lin had not borrowed cartridges from the Indian. Jackwoon had lied about Lin having used the rifle and about his having taken it with him when he had disappeared.

However, Fallon did not divulge his knowledge to the Indian. He had discovered enough to convince him that there was a secret understanding between Blandin and Jackwoon, and that he might expect further attacks by Blandin, and disloyalty from the Indian.

CHAPTER VI.

WHITE WATER.

DURING the next few days Fallon and Jackwoon made several short portages and one long one; and on these Jackwoon tested the mettle of the white man. Without looking back, he moved with his utmost speed, an effort that taxed his toughened muscles and stamina, as he sought to outdistance Fallon.

He never succeeded. If the portage was a mile or ten miles, he always found Fallon at his heels when he halted or when the portage ended. Amazed and sullen, he was compelled

to admit that Fallon's strength and stamina were greater than his own.

Because of his pride, Jackwoon would be extravagantly deliberate in lowering his pack and setting his canoe down, knowing that an exhibition of haste would betray his weariness to the white man. But after the load was off his shoulders he would not be able instantly to straighten his cramped legs. Fallon could not fail to realize his condition.

He watched keenly for like signs of weakness or weariness in Fallon's movements, but he observed none. Fallon appeared to be tireless. He would drop his pack carelessly, swing his canoe off his shoulders with marvelous ease and dexterity, flex his great muscles like an athlete going through setting-up exercises, and expand his great chest with obvious delight. At such times his blue eyes would dance with exultation.

A great man, conceded Jackwoon. A white god. Never had he seen another like him. There was in Jackwoon a reluctant admiration, restrained and tempered by the hatred that is engendered by the consciousness of inferiority.

Fallon had ceased talking. But he had not ceased watching Jackwoon, gazing steadily at him out of an enigmatic silence.

Day by day Jackwoon grew more uneasy. And day by day his hatred of Fallon grew. He began to wonder about ways and means of getting rid of Fallon. There were many ways, of course. The only thing that deterred him was the conviction that he would not succeed, that Fallon was somehow invulnerable.

They were on the Hayes River, paddling down a gorge between two small lakes, when the dark thought came to Jackwoon. At first it startled him, for it was nothing short of an inspiration. Then as he sent the canoe swiftly down the stream he dwelt upon the idea, considering it well. In the end he decided to act upon it.

The stream was here smooth and wide and deep. The current was lazy, but he, who had paddled down it many times, knew of its powerful lower current, knew that the water felt the pull of the tearing, rushing rapids not more than two or three miles distant.

A few—a very few—times had the rapids been shot with a canoe. Jackwoon had achieved the feat once, but he knew he would never try it again. There was a channel, to be sure, and he had found it. But the finding had been merely accidental; his ultimate escape from the huge, hidden rocks having resulted from the fact that in his fright he had done nothing more than to permit the canoe to race with the current. He had seen the rocks, had felt them merely touch the sides and bottom of his craft, as he had flashed past them on the crests of the boiling waves that swirled and eddied like a mad thing in the agonies of death.

And now Jackwoon's eyes glittered. Now he would see if the white man were invulnerable—if his gods could keep this death from him.

He had not told Fallon about the rapids. And now, already feeling the surface pull of the current, he made not a motion that might be construed as apprehension or preparation. He did not shift his position or turn his head.

HALF a mile from the rapids the current seized them and bore them along swiftly, faster than either man could paddle. A paddle could not increase the speed of their

canoes, and was of use only as a rudder. The stream made a sharp bend to the right, and the big granite walls around which the water surged concealed the rapids from view until one was almost upon them.

Jackwoon knew exactly what Fallon's intelligence would impel him to do. He could do nothing less—and nothing more. And as Jackwoon's craft sped along the curving walls he observed out of the corners of his eyes that the white man was striving to drive closer; the swiftness of the current had warned him.

He thought just what Jackwoon wanted him to think—that Jackwoon's purpose was to run the rapids. And now, cunningly, the Indian used his paddle, retarding slightly the speed of his craft. He knew that the white man would believe his guide's purpose was to permit him to draw closer, to keep his canoe close in the wake of the guide's.

When the white water came into sight, Jackwoon made his first sign, a signal to apprise the white man of danger. He moved his left hand slightly outward, as though pushing something invisible, warning Fallon to keep out from the granite walls. If Fallon did that—if he permitted his canoe to be seized by the current in the center of the river—he would not be able to drive his canoe out of it before he reached the white water. And if the white water caught him, his gods would have to take the paddle into their hands. Fallon obeyed his signal.

It was done quickly. At the edge of the white water Jackwoon swiftly swung the prow of his canoe around and drove it shoreward, into a sheltered lagoon out of the current, where the water calmly swirled against a low, sloping shore line.

He saw Fallon's canoe shoot by. He caught a glimpse of the white man's face; met the glint of contempt in his eyes; noted with silent fury a grim smile curving his lips. And then Fallon was in the white water, and the spume was covering him like a white, fleecy veil.

Jackwoon sat long in his canoe at the edge of the sloping beach. He was smiling vindictively. No more uneasiness; no more of feeling his back muscles cringe and writhe with the white man's gaze upon him; no more sitting across from Fallon at the camp fire, not daring to lift his gaze from the embers.

He'd go back now, to Rossville, to Landieu, and report Fallon's death. An accident, of course. Fallon had been determined to shoot the rapids, even after he had been told of the danger.

Jackwoon was very deliberate now. There was time. He landed, dragged his canoe to the sloping beach, got his pack ready, swung it from his shoulders, balanced the canoe and set off over the portage that he always used in going around the rapids.

It was not a very difficult portage, but it was rather long, for it led down a slope away from the river for quite a distance, then circled back to the smooth water a mile from the rapids.

It was Jackwoon's curiosity that was sending him to the still water, where he might find Fallon's body and the wreck of his canoe. Jackwoon would spend the night there, perhaps, watching the dark waters by the light of his fire, gloating over the death of the white man whose strength and spirit had *seemed* unconquerable. This white man who was so wise and yet had been led to his death by the waving of a hand.

Exultant, grinning his triumph, and moving with care and deliberation lest he make a false step and bring retribution upon himself for his deed, he came down the long, circling slope toward the level land at the edge of the smooth water. There was some s c r a g g l y spruce here, and some poplar and black willow. This growth obstructed his view of the river edge for some time. But when he got through it and got a clear view of the bank, his knees sagged with sudden weakness and he almost fell.

For there, sitting on the bank, calmly smoking his pipe, was Fallon!

JACKWOON'S muscles grew rigid again. His brain flamed with a great wrath. He made no sound, however, but merely stood there staring.

Apparently Fallon was not aware of Jackwoon's presence. His back was toward the Indian. He was sitting on a pebbly slope with his knees drawn up. His arms were folded over his chest, and he seemed to be interestedly watching the smoothly swirling water. His canoe had been pulled up on the bank, away from the water.

Jackwoon's rage and disappointment stirred him to a murderous impulse. He was trembling with eagerness now, but he managed to swing canoe and pack from his shoulders. The rifle he always carried was under the pack straps. He slipped it out, sat down on the pack, raised the rifle to his shoulder and took steady aim at Fallon's broad back. He pressed the trigger—and heard the firing pin click futilely, metallically.

He sat, stupefied, and saw Fallon turn his head and look at him with level gaze.

"No use, Jack," Fallon said. "I took them out several days ago. And there are no more in your pack. I took them, too. They are a good many miles back."

Jackwoon's muscles turned to water as he sat on the pack with his mouth open. The rifle dropped from his nerveless hands. Awe, and a nameless terror, had seized him. He would die here. Presently Fallon would draw out his own rifle and begin to shoot. He'd do it calmly, as he did everything.

But for a few minutes nothing happened. Then Fallon turned over on his stomach, and Jackwoon observed that while Fallon had been sitting there he had had a rifle between his knees. The weapon was in his hands now and was carelessly aimed at the Indian. Fallon now spoke, and his voice had a ring of cold contempt in it.

"You have forgotten your gods, eh, Jack?"

Jackwoon did not answer. He could think of nothing to say. He was not afraid now. He had a fatalistic conviction that he was to die in this place, where he had twice attempted the white man's life. Two failures were enough. And so he sat, his eyes sullen, his lips in a heavy pout, returning Fallon's gaze. His gods had indeed deserted him.

"Shoot," Jackwoon said.

"Presently."

For a long time Fallon was silent. He watched Jackwoon's face over the barrel of the rifle. He moved the muzzle slowly. He seemed to be undecided. Twice the muzzle covered the Indian's heart; once it was directed at his stomach; half a dozen times it was pointed directly at his forehead, for staring at the muzzle he could look along the barrel.

The white man's steady eyes were on the sights; and with death immi-

nent, Jackwoon wondered and marveled at Fallon's cold nerve.

"How old are you, Jack?" he said.

"Thirty-four summers."

"Married?"

"Me got squaw."

"Papoose?"

"No."

"Well, if you die now it won't make any difference. Maybe squaw like you now. Maybe when you die she'll get another brave. There's always another brave, Jack."

Jackwoon's lips formed a word, but gave forth no sound. White Bear! Fallon was right; many times had Jackwoon's heart been torn by jealousy of White Bear. For he had observed how White Bear's eyes quickened when they rested upon his woman; when his death was established as a certainty White Bear would make the advances he had long meditated.

FALLON had observed Jackwoon's hesitation; he saw the dark blood steal into Jackwoon's face, and down again, to coagulate and burn at his heart. Cunningly, with a deep knowledge of the elementary passions of Jackwoon, learned by his constant scrutiny and study of the Indian during the days and nights of their journey, Fallon had struck the chord that had set his heart to tingling with a desire to live.

But not at once did Jackwoon speak. Nor did Fallon interfere with his mental processes. The silence between them grew long.

"White man no shoot. Jackwoon sorry."

The words came slowly, reluctantly. But the sullen eyes were gleaming hopefully.

"You want to live, eh?"

A nod.

"All right. You live. How long, depends upon how you answer some questions. Is Lin Underhill alive?"

Jackwoon nodded.

"Where is he?"

"Not know."

"Who took him away?"

"Blandin. Kelso. Indian." Jackwoon held up four fingers.

"Blandin, Kelso and four Indians?"

A nod.

"They took him from your Shamattawa camp?"

"Yes."

"Was Underhill hurt?"

"No."

"Where did they take him?"

"Not know. Up north."

"What did Blandin say?" Fallon repeated the question he had asked Jackwoon several days ago.

"Blandin say they no hurt Underhill. Blandin say give Jackwoon new rifle, canoe, plenty gold soon if keep mouth shut. Get rifle, canoe. No get gold."

"That's why you tried to kill me. The gold hasn't been paid, and you thought it wouldn't be paid if I interfered. . . . Where does Randall live?"

"Little Fox—Big Fox."

"How far?"

"One sleep down river. Three sleep north."

Fallon was silent. He was silent so long that Jackwoon grew cold with a dread that sat so heavily upon him that it bowed his shoulders. Then, finally, Fallon got up. Slowly he stood erect and stretched his great arms.

"All right, Jack," he said, "let's go."

He walked to his canoe, slipped the rifle into the pack straps, pushed the canoe into the water and shoved out into the current. He paddled lazily, holding the canoe against the current

until Jackwoon launched his own craft and swung down the river ahead of him.

Lin Underhill had not been killed by his abductors. The fact that Blanche Devake had offered fifty thousand dollars proved conclusively to Fallon that the purpose was to obtain from Underhill a large amount of money, by ransom or by taking possession of the gold that Lin Underhill had acquired since he had come into the country.

Fallon had some reason to think the latter, for no ransom demand had reached the elder Underhill, and Fallon had not forgotten that the Devake woman had mentioned a mine "that would make Midas envious."

Fallon was pleased. This expedition was not to be a search for a dead man; it was to be a battle for a life and a fortune—for two lives, his own and Lin Underhill's. Arrayed against him were two unscrupulous white men and all the lawless red men that could be bought or bribed. It might be that even the somewhat mythical Randall would develop into an enemy.

Fallon was headed into a mysterious country. A few hundred feet in front of him was a faithless guide, behind him were two men who had already revealed their murderous purpose, and upon all sides as he pushed further into the wilderness would be the hazards of the silent coverts from which might be sped the winged arrow of the white men's forest confederates.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

One Jackass Over

THE motor car has vanquished the horse, but in sections of the southwestern United States and Mexico the burro is still holding its own as a beast of burden. The nimble and sure-footed little beast is used to freight ore down precipitous trails and to transport supplies where motor trucks cannot go. Mexican woodchoppers use burro trains to carry *leña*, or firewood, from the mountains to settlements below. The burros are belled, and the musical tinkle of their bells as a train of them moves slowly through the streets adds much to the picturesque Mexican towns.

The burro, along with his relative, the mule, has played an invaluable part in the discovery and development of the mining industries of the United States. Even to-day, in parts of the West, it is not uncommon to see a burro loaded with pick, pan and kit, and led by a bearded prospector who is in search of the El Dorado that lies just over the next hill.

The wild asses of the desert, ancestors of the burro, were first domesticated in Egypt. They were used as beasts of burden long years before the horse was known.

A classic burro story of the West concerns an Eastern express messenger who was making his first run on a Western railroad. Totally unfamiliar with the word "burro," when he saw it on his list he concluded that it must be an article of furniture. At the end of the run he checked up and made out his report, writing: "One bureau short; one jackass over."

Vincent B. Wilson.

He could not breathe, looking at the noose

Grogan Gets a Shave

Grogan was as bold a smoke-swallower as San Francisco boasted—but the fear that haunted him could not be quenched like the fires he fought

By ROBERT J. PEARSALL

"MURDERER! Murderer! Murderer!"

Grogan positively and clearly knew it was a dream-voice that was accusing him, but he couldn't help struggling and crying out. When he came to himself he was standing beside his bunk with twenty pairs of eyes fixed on him. He glared around fearfully, but grins reassured him; he hadn't yet betrayed himself. He wanted to look at Spitzker, but didn't.

"Had another one, Groggy?" questioned his friend Staples, worried and yet trying to speak carelessly.

Grogan swallowed and steadied his voice. What would they say if they knew he had killed a man, and had decided to kill another—or almost decided it?

"Yes. What did I do? Talk in my sleep?"

"Nope, not what you could properly say 'talked.' Just yelped a little like a scared puppy. What d'ye suppose is the matter, anyway?"

"Indigestion, darn it. Stomach's goin' back on me."

With a grimace, Grogan relieved his trembling knees by sitting down on his

bunk. With hands which he managed to keep steady he produced and filled his pipe, while Anderson, the grinning imp, the practical joker of the bunk-room, jibed at him.

"Indigestion, my foot! Conscience, that's what's the matter. Flamin' youth, likely—some flapper's got a holt of you since you got your whiskers off. Better keep prayin' you *don't* talk in your sleep or Missis Grogan 'll get next."

Anderson snickered, and the men laughed at that, for middle-aged Ladderman Grogan was the steadiest, most home-loving man in Truck Company Two, San Francisco Fire Department. Grogan was relieved at the good-natured laughter, for it proved that no one suspected anything yet.

"What's her name?" went on the would-be humorist, Anderson. "Tell us and maybe we'll help you. Maybe some of us'll take her off your hands."

A chorus of groans answered him. "Oh, shut up, you damn fool," said some one, shying a boot at him. Anderson's attempts at wit were more than usually unwelcome to-night.

The men were worried about Grogan. For a week he hadn't been himself; ever since that accident in the Altamont fire, when a falling timber had caught him. He'd been knocked out, his cheek was badly cut, and his beard had to be shaved off; but what was all that to the fiercest fire-fighter in that company of "Indians"? As for Grogan himself, he was well content that they should think he was losing his nerve. Better that than—something else.

Now he sat smoking till he got hold of himself. Then, with an attempt at carelessness, he looked over at Spitzker, who'd joined the company the very day Grogan had come back from the medico minus his beard and with a plaster on his face that didn't hide anything at all.

His eyes met Spitzker's small, squinting eyes squarely. Spitzker had been watching him, as usual. Grogan stiffened angrily and shivered at the same moment; and then, with a sudden impulse such as had won him two medals for bravery, rose and sauntered toward Spitzker.

GROGAN was a big man, middle-aged, but he walked with the effortless ease of a stripling. Save for a sensitive mouth, his face was a strong one; but he was trembling inwardly when he stopped in front of Spitzker.

"Notice you keep eyin' me," said Grogan with a good pretense of carelessness. "Have we met before?"

Spitzker looked startled, but tried to cover it up. He was about Grogan's age, but much smaller, and his face was commonplace. He grinned, but not at all naturally. "No!" he said. "I guess not."

"Thought we might've, that's all. World's a small place. My mistake, I guess."

He hesitated, but Spitzker said nothing else, and Grogan moved on. He went to the door, looked out a moment, and then returned to his bunk. On the way he shot a swift side-glance at Spitzker and saw Spitzker watching him again. Bent forward on his bunk a little was Spitzker, his smallish eyes intent. Like a waiting vulture, or a watchful spy—and Grogan shivered again.

But still he hoped. It couldn't be that his eight-year-old secret was his secret no longer. It couldn't be that he was trapped by coincidence—such a coincidence as the loss of his beard and the

coming to the company on the same day of a man who might have known him in Chicago! Yet certainly Spitzker had started at sight of him and had been watching him ever since. Watching him, studying him—sometimes, it seemed, with a pleased, self-congratulatory look, as though he was already counting the reward that was offered for Grogan.

And of course the thing was in line with Grogan's fears. Try as he would for eight years, Grogan had never forgotten them; and, indeed, as the years passed, his fears increased. At first he'd been fortified by the same carelessness that had got him into the trouble. But he grew older and soberer; one by one he added to himself a family, and his love for them grew; and so did his knowledge of the smallness of the world, and that San Francisco was but a step from Chicago. He should have gone farther when he had a chance, but now his family anchored him.

He tried to change his carriage and voice; he got a fireman's job and a fireman's uniform to hide in; but his main reliance was his beard. When the doctor insisted on having it shaved a chill of dread ran through him. He had come back to the fire house full of fear, and his fear had been justified by meeting the stranger, Spitzker, face to face.

Every move Spitzker made—and Grogan knew most of them—confirmed his dread. It was consoling, though, that Spitzker was still studying him. It indicated that Spitzker wasn't certain, hadn't denounced him yet.

There was still time then—for what? Grogan smoked and thought and shuddered at his thoughts. There was guilt in them, though he felt none for his old crime. Come to think of it, he had never felt it. Of all her population, probably Chicago could best spare Hennessey. And the manner of the killing had been such that Grogan had no gruesome memory.

Indeed, he had always seemed some way remote from his crime. It touched him only through his fears. But now there seemed something saving in it, as the thought pounded through his mind as it had pounded for a week:

"If I killed, I can kill."

That was coupled with a sentence from the fire commissioner's last speech: "Firemen's lives are in each other's hands."

"Tumblin' walls kill," thought Grogan. "Truck wheels kill. Ax heads flyin' off their handles. Hose heads sometimes, if they get loose. It might easy be an accident. An accident."

The men were getting ready for bed. Grogan had napped prematurely, having had a sleepless night before. He removed his clothing and placed his "turn-out" ready on the floor. At "lights out" he turned in, with the would-be joker Anderson calling over to him:

"Let us rest to-night, Grogan, for Pete's sake. Indigestion or fair sex or conscience, don't get to talking to-night."

Grogan scowled, for the words chilled him. For a week he had been desperately afraid of what he might say in his sleep. But to-night there seemed little danger. Hour after hour he lay awake, meditating on the scaffold, or the years and endless years of stripes and barred sunlight that he saw in prospect, whipping his fears up to the striking and his courage up to the sticking point.

"If I was only sure. Hennessey didn't have anybody. Spitzker hasn't

anybody. But I—what'll happen to Jane and Tom and Bess?"

TOWARD morning he fell asleep, or rather into a procession of horrible dreams. He reënacted his quarrel with Hennessey, saloon-keeper, ward boss, crooked politician. Grogan was foreman in a foundry which violated the fire laws. It might continue to violate them if the boss, who was also owner, "came through."

Grogan—whose name was then Harper—knew most about the violation, was a bit of a rounder out of working hours, and was selected by Hennessey as the natural go-between in extortion. But Grogan happened to be loyal to his boss, which is a quality of youth. He told Hennessey in flaming words where he might go.

Worse, he told others about it, and where Hennessey ought to be sent. Indignant, he was. Young, foolish and idealistic, after a fashion. It didn't hurt Hennessey any. He went in person to Grogan's boss, and part of their bargain was Grogan's dismissal from the plant.

Grogan was without a job. The word was passed, and he couldn't get another. He was going to be married, but could not while jobless. He would try another city. He drew his savings from the bank—and was sandbagged and robbed on his way to the depot. Hennessey's work, of course.

"When I get a man, I get him," Hennessey boasted. But his mistake was in leaving the man alive, for presently Grogan was drunk and hunting Hennessey. So drunk that his memory lapsed.

Then—the very next thing he remembered—he had been roused to consciousness by a terrible shock. He was standing over Hennessey, who was dead in his bed. They were in the room back of Hennessey's saloon, where he sometimes slept, and there was a heavy stool with a bloodied top in Grogan's hand; moonlight, too, and a policeman coming through the open window.

Grogan, reliving the thing, groaned in his sleep. His muscles tensed and he rolled convulsively. With some such convulsive movement he had beaten the policeman's shot through the opposite window. Then had followed flight on foot and in box-cars, until the Pacific had halted him in San Francisco.

Grogan woke, trembling all over, with the gaunt specter of the gallows hovering over him. He lay awake awhile and then slept awhile again; and, waking or sleeping, the same horror possessed him. Then daylight came, and he opened his eyes for keeps—opened them to stare aghast at ropes laid carefully on the foot of his bunk. Ropes arranged in the form of a gallows, with a dangling, empty noose.

For a moment, Grogan couldn't move. He didn't even breathe. Then he reared violently up, and with a furious sweep of his hand he obliterated the hideous sign. And for a moment sat there, staring with panicky eyes around at his sleeping bunkmates.

Sleeping? But they weren't all sleeping. One must be awake—the one who had planted this thing. Awake and watching to see him betray himself—as he had betrayed himself. Awake and watching between half-closed eyelids—Spitzker, over there! Spitzker hadn't been quite sure; he had set a trap for Grogan; he was sure now.

Grogan lay back, trying to think, to see everything clearly. But he had no time, for at that moment, *clang! clang!* the tapper rang. Their call!

"Hi, boys! Hi!" For a moment Grogan was the single-minded fireman again. He was first into his turn-out of boots and breeches, first down the brass pole, first to the running board of the truck. The others came tumbling after in a mad race; the truck was manned, and away they rolled through the empty streets of dawn.

"On the water front," said the captain, looking back. "The freighter Harvey. A three-alarm call."

They tore down Market Street with the gong pounding and the deputy's siren shrieking ahead. On the Embarcadero they turned to the right, and presently saw two fire boats, looking like water bugs, playing streams into a column of smoke alongside a pier. The pier itself was already a wilderness of hose; the freighter lying alongside was enveloped in smoke, in which, however, there wasn't as yet a single wisp of flame. The deputy, looking worried, met them as they came to a stop.

"Cargo mostly of barreled palm oil," said he. "Fire likely been smolderin' for days in her bunkers, but she didn't bust out till this mornin'. Oil's on fire now, but she's heavy stuff. Fire's in the for'ard hold and workin' aft. Get on board and see what you can do."

THE captain led the way up the ladder. Grogan followed, dragging at the heavy limp hose. The air was heavy with greasy smoke that columned out of the cargo hatch, and the ship had a list to port.

On deck they met a heavy-set man swathed in rubber from head to foot. "I'm skipper," he said. "Can I do anything?"

Truck Two's captain blinked at him. "Everybody else off?"

"Everything human's off. There's a young lion in a crate in the for'ard hold. Billed to Bailey's circus. Wish we could get him off. He's been like a lamb."

"Hell's bells! The fire's down there, ain't it?"

"Yes, but—"

"And the oil, too. And," the captain peered through the murk, "all we seem to be doin' is waterin' down the coal-hatch—with the fire away forward. Why can't we get at it through the starboard hatch?"

"She's bolted on the inside."

"Well, she'll have to be unbolted." The fire captain strode to the forward hold, up which smoke was pouring. For a moment he stared down, estimating the chances, and then turned to the nozzle-crew. "Two volunteers wanted to carry the hose down there and open that hatch. What? You all after medals?"

They had all moved a little forward, but Grogan had done more than that. With a quick movement, he placed himself beside Spitzker. He was quite sure he would be taken, for his superability as a smoke-swallower had been proved many times. And if the captain chanced to see the new man, he might decide to give him his baptism in smoke. And then—the two down there. "Firemen's lives are in each other's hands."

"Grogan, you're in charge. Go with him, Spitzker. Take this rope, Grogan; tie it around your waist; and if you want water, jerk it. Spitzker, take this ax. You know where the starboard hatch'd be on a ship like this?" he asked Grogan.

"Noticed the port one comin' on. Right opposite."

"All right. Step on it, now."

Grogan went first, dragging the

hose. It was like dropping down into a section of hell. Hot, oily smoke boiled up past him as he hurried down the ladder, while the men behind him paid out the hose. Spitzker came behind and Grogan heard him cough, and something in Grogan exulted.

"Wonder if he'll suspect anything, be on his guard? Well, it won't matter if he is. He'll soon be helpless enough."

From somewhere, distant and yet distinct, came the soft swish of flame. But none was yet visible from the bottom of the ladder. Grogan stepped out and found himself moving on top of upright barrels probably filled with palm-oil. Cautiously he stepped from barrel-head to barrel-head, dragging the hose forward, until, far ahead, he saw a ruby tongue of flame darting up and down.

That must be very near the prow. Somewhere to the right, then, in the stifling murk, lay the forward starboard hatch. "Come on," Grogan muttered to Spitzker, changing his course slightly.

"Do it over there," Grogan told himself. "For the sake of Jane and the kids. The nozzle's the thing to do it with. Yes, that's it—the nozzle."

Perilously they moved forward on top of the barrels of liquid tinder. The smoke was stifling even to Grogan's hardened lungs—he was inhaling great drafts of it. He knew how much worse it must be to the green man behind, yet he heard never a whimper. Spitzker was doing his full share of dragging the hose—the hose which was to furnish Grogan both a means of murder and an easy explanation. Even if the fire was put out, even if Spitzker was found with his head battered in—still Grogan would be safe enough.

"Perfect!" thought Grogan. "Yes, it's perfect."

FROM barrel-head to barrel-head they advanced, toward that darting, growing shaft of flame which showed through the smoky murk. As the smoke thickened and the heat increased, Grogan's mind, working machine-like, formulated in every detail the manner of the killing. He would reach the hatch first. Taking the ax from Spitzker, he would drive back the bolt that secured the hatch. Then, turning, he would strike, not with the ax but with an equally deadly weapon, the heavy brass nozzle of the hose. Then he would jerk the cord, and water, driven by the powerful engine, would burst through the hose—three hundred gallons a minute. And to all men, the leaping hose-head would be the real murderer. "It got away from us," he would explain.

"Murderer!" But Grogan braced himself: "If I killed, I can kill."

It was a nerve-racking, body-torturing journey. Once Spitzker, behind him, cried out; a barrel-head had collapsed and let him down knee-deep into thick oil. He climbed out with a hoarse laugh, and Grogan shuddered, continuing the march over the invisible stepping-stones. At last the metal nozzle projecting a little ahead of Grogan clanged on the side of the ship. Now to the left, with their hands following along the hot metal wall of the ship, feeling for the hatchway; the fiery flux ahead growing brighter every moment, and in their ears the sound of the oil in the lower hold boiling furiously as in a huge caldron.

"God! If we don't find it soon there won't be no need of killin'."

As they groped along, the light grew stronger until it became a dull glare

that gave them a faint view of the smoky tempest around them. The hot, pungent oil-fumes burned their throats, and every yard gained seemed a mile. Then suddenly Grogan, staggering forward, stepped off into vacancy. Both of them stepped off into the void, dragging the hose with them.

Instantly, Grogan knew what had happened. They had come to the end of their journey, to a space in front of the hatch where the barrels had been cleared away. But he had not realized how weak the smoke had rendered the uncomplaining Spitzker. Spitzker sank mutely to his knees, and could not rise again.

Easy enough to finish him now. Easy—easy enough! Spitzker had sprawled in front of Grogan, and need never know what had hit him. Grogan had the hose-head lifted. The sickness which wrenched him body and soul did not all come from the smoke. He must—*must* bring it down. He would!

Clamping his jaw, he braced himself. He fought his instinct with his will. But the struggle was rudely interrupted. The next instant he was leaping—fleeing for his life.

The fall had jerked the signal cord fastened to his waist. The water burst from above, the hose leaped to life like a giant serpent, and the heavy brass nozzle was jerked from Grogan's smoke-weakened grip.

A stream of water rushed over him, and he heard the flying brass sledge, which the nozzle had become, pounding back and forth. He was out of its reach but Spitzker wasn't; Spitzker was a prisoner of his own weakness, confined with that hurtling death.

Then Grogan found himself going back. He did not know why he was going. He, Harper the murderer, who was out to kill again, mentally stood aside in amazement, and watched the fireman who was called Jim Grogan creep back to face death.

He crawled forward on his stomach. By the sound, the nozzle was flying high; and he knew that a single tap from it would sprinkle his brains on the barrels of palm-oil. Once the sweeping hammer grazed his back, and he flattened himself, but reached for the hose back of it.

He found it, throbbing and pulsing. Gripping hard, he slid his hands along it, as up the length of a fighting python. Feeling about, he found a grip for his feet; then his hands shot out and grappled with the murderous head. It tried to throw him off, it lifted him from his feet, but he clung on.

Then he dropped on the struggling nozzle, clenching it with sinewy hands, throttling it into submission. Nearby, in the growing glare, he saw Spitzker still crouching. He had escaped both the murderous nozzle and the murderous man—yes, Grogan knew he had escaped.

"Git up! Git up, can't you!" rasped Grogan. "There's the hatch. Git it open while I hold this damn thing."

SPITZKER was staring at him through the red-lighted gloom. He knew how close to death he had been. "By heavens, you're a man," he muttered, struggling to his feet.

"A man, hell!" Grogan laughed hoarsely. "If I was a man, I'd have let it kill you. I intended to kill you. Get that."

Spitzker, moving toward the hatchway, stopped. "You intended *what?*"

"To kill you—and I ought to have done it," blazed Grogan. "You'd

turn me up, would you? After eight years, and me with my kids and all. And for killin' that rotten crook, Hennessey—but, hell! Get on! Get that hatch open."

"Hennessey! What Hennessey?"

"You don't know nothin', do you? Why you been watchin, me? Why'd you fix that gallows thing on my bunk? 'Hinky-dink' Hennessey, of course. You don't know nothin' about the Fourth Ward, Chicago, eh? If you turn me up after this— But go on, now. Get busy."

"'Hinky-dink' Hennessey! But he—"

There was something strange in Spitzker's voice, but danger was too pressing. He started forward again, and now he attacked the hatchway. The clamor of his ax on metal mingled with the sound of the escaping water and the increasing roar of the fire. The flames ahead were advancing fast, and Grogan played the hose on them; but scalding steam mingling with the smoke forced him to turn aside.

As he did so, another horror revealed itself. A deep growl sounded from behind, and Grogan, whirling about, saw that the other occupant of the hold had somehow released itself. Plain in the rosy glow, lit by a fire behind, a fire-crazed lion crouched and snarled furiously.

Spitzker heard it and turned. Grogan noticed the cessation of the hammering. "Get that hatch open," he ordered again harshly. "I'll take care of this."

But how he was to do it, he didn't know. Spitzker had the ax; he was weaponless. Now he saw that the phosphorescent eyes were fixed on Spitzker, not on him. The spouting water concealed him, perhaps, or maybe it frightened the lion. Behind the lion, Grogan saw that the flames had advanced almost to the ladder. Very soon, if they couldn't get the hatch open, they would be hopelessly trapped. They were shut off from the ladder, anyway, as long as the lion stood there. But if the lion leaped on Spitzker, Grogan's way of escape was open. That was Grogan's thought; then the lion leaped, and Grogan's reaction was instantaneous.

Straight at the lion, he swung the hose; and the mighty stream of water met the king of beasts in mid-air. Met it and turned it completely over, and sent it sliding along the barrels, to slip down between them out of sight.

"Got him! Hurry up, Spitzker. Open that hatch."

Spitzker was hammering at the bolt that held it. The heat had expanded all the metal, so the clasp held like a vise. Grogan couldn't turn to observe Spitzker's progress, for the beast was coming again across the barrel-tops. With a maddened snarl, it rushed and then leaped; and again Grogan skillfully met it with the pounding deluge of water. Over it spun and back, and Grogan chuckled hysterically out of his smoke-scorched throat.

"Holdin' him, Spitzker. How you comin'?"

"Slow, but—gettin' it. Me for the bay, if I get through this!"

Spitzker's tortured voice trailed off. Grogan tensed himself for another swift movement, for the tawny menace was returning again. This time the lion didn't leap but rushed straight across the barrel-tops at Grogan; and when the terrific outburst of water hit it, it still struggled and scratched its way forward. Not until it was nearly to the nozzle-head did it begin to give way, slipping back with a furi-

ous snarling and swishing of its tail. Grogan continued to play the water on it, holding the nozzle more easily and steadily than before.

Then he realized with a gasp why he was holding it so easily. The force of the water was lessening!

"HURRY up, Spitzker. There's somethin' wrong."

"Somethin' wrong." Spitzker laughed maniacally. "Somethin'! If you can tell me what ain't—" Then, looking back, he saw fresh disaster was upon them. "What's the matter? They stopped pumpin' up there?"

"Hose burnin' through. The fire's got to the ladder. What the hell you stoppin' for?"

The clangor of ax on metal was renewed. Grogan kept the water turned on the lion, but the stream fell away continually. Near the ladder was a hissing of water on fire; that was where the pressure was going. The lion, as if encouraged, kept zigzagging back and forth in front of Grogan, ever nearer and nearer. Now it seemed to have forgotten Spitzker. Grogan felt weak; there was a roaring in his ears, and his streaming eyes were nearly blinded. Now he couldn't see the lion. Spitzker's voice reached him faintly.

"Look out! He's comin' again."

Grogan braced himself and grabbed the hose just below the nozzle. When the water quit coming, he could use the nozzle as a club. But his struggles with the hose had completely exhausted his smoke-enfeebled muscles. He heard the peculiar snarl that told him that the lion was about to leap again, and all he could do was wave the hose feebly.

Then something pounced on him. Grogan sprawled on the deck, feeling the hose torn from his hands, and shrinking in anticipation of rending claws and slashing fangs. But nothing touched him, and he looked up. Spitzker was standing over him, directing the stream on the lion.

"What the devil!" Grogan yelled. "That won't last. The hatch, man—only hope!"

Then it was over. The water died suddenly to a drizzle. Simultaneously, Grogan felt a touch of coolness. Or perhaps not that—but a lessening of the heat. The smoke was eddying before a current of air. Spitzker must have opened the hatchway, and then come back, inviting death. Inviting death, surely; for now Spitzker had leaped to the top of a barrel in full view of the lion. He was facing the lion, gesticulating, uttering hoarse, challenging cries.

"You fool!" Grogan muttered, and tried to rise, but failed. "You fool! Fool!"

It was suicide, what Spitzker was doing. And yet, maybe— A gleam of possible understanding flashed to Grogan. And with it, renewed suspicion. Grogan dead would be worth no reward money to Spitzker. If Spitzker were intent on saving Grogan's life, verily he had his motive.

"I'll not let him. I'll die here. Then Jane 'll get my fireman's pension."

Then Grogan knew his suspicions were true, for, within charging distance of the hatchway, Spitzker leaped. Leaped not into the safety of the bay outside; but caught himself, swung around, and stood framed in the square hatchway opening, again challenging the lion.

"Come on! Come on, damn you!" Spitzker shook his fist at the beast, kicked, danced, snarled in answer to its snarl.

The lion came on, until it was with-

in four feet of Grogan. But it never observed his still, prostrate figure; straight it pointed, crouching, at the challenging figure in the hatchway opening. And Grogan thought of sacrificing himself, defeating Spitzker's purpose, struggling up and throwing himself on the lion. Better—better than the gallows! He might have done it, but when he tried to move, he could not; the poisonous fumes and oxygenless air had done their work. Then, like a flash, the lion leaped, so swiftly that Grogan could hardly follow its passage over him.

"He's gone," thought Grogan. "Spitzker's gone. He could never escape that jump." But there was no cry, no sound of impact or struggle, nothing but one faint splash far away from the freighter's side. Grogan twisted around and saw the now vacant hatchway, through which the lion had evidently hurtled harmlessly, while Spitzker must have dropped, close to the hull, to the safety and coolness of the water alongside.

So Spitzker was safe. Grogan himself was safe, too—safe from the gallows, safe in death, for the languor and weakness of death were ending his sufferings, and no help that Spitzker might summon could arrive in time. Spitzker had lost his reward. He had failed in that. Grogan chuckled noiselessly far back in his blistered throat; and then his triumph-in-death passed as a figure dragged itself weakly, persistently, through the hatchway from without.

"Spitzker! It's Spitzker again!" the prostrate man croaked.

GROGAN stared at him madly. It was plain what had happened. Spitzker, dropping, had caught the bottom of the hatchway frame. Revived and strengthened somewhat by the fresh air he had been getting, he was able to drag himself back up and now he was coming through the hatchway for Grogan.

"No, no! Keep away! Keep away!"

"Grogan! It's Spitzker. Have you gone crazy?"

"I won't go. You can't turn me up. I won't let you. I'm goin' to die here. My wife—a pension—better'n havin' you get a reward."

Grogan, with Spitzker's hands on his shoulders, struggled weakly but effectively. Effectively, for Spitzker still had only a fraction of his strength. Unless Grogan helped himself, he couldn't be moved. Spitzker desisted then.

"Gone plumb crazy, have you? See here! Git holt of yourself. I ain't no policeman. I don't know what you done. I ain't never seen you before in my life."

"Liar! You've been watchin' me."

Spitzker caught his breath and choked on the smoke of it and coughed horribly. But when he spoke again, there was eagerness in his voice, as though there was something that he, too, wanted to clear up quickly.

"Why, you was watchin' *me*," Spitzker echoed. "Was that why—"

"An' you fixed that noose," Grogan persisted, but now there was doubt in his voice. It had come to him that some way he might have made a mistake. "This mornin'. To trap me."

"Noose, hell! It was that fool Anderson done that. Come, get movin', for the sake of that wife you're talkin' about. We can talk while—" Again he dragged at Grogan's shoulders and this time Grogan slowly pushed himself forward. They were almost to the hatchway when Spitzker spoke again, more easily now, for fresh air was diluting the smoke.

"It was the damn joker Anderson that fixed that noose," Spitzker repeated. "I saw him do it, but I didn't dare object. You woke us up last night talkin' about gallows an' the like. He thought he was funny. I didn't, but—But listen—you mean you ain't after me?" Spitzker demanded of Grogan.

"Me after you? Hell! I thought 'twas the other way around." Suddenly Grogan, with fresh air in his lungs, began to laugh hoarsely. "What you hidin' out from? Who 've *you* killed?"

"I ain't killed nobody," said Spitzker. He was peering through the hatchway. "We're safe enough now; there's a fireboat comin'. We might as well have this out right now, mister. No, I ain't killed nobody, but there's a little thing back in—I ain't sayin' where. An' when you kept watchin' me an' watchin' me—"

"Like you did me! A pair of us." A queer exultation was in Grogan's voice; a mighty conviction had come to him. "But I feel as if I never could have killed anybody either. I couldn't kill you, just now, could I? If I'd killed, I could 've killed again. It must have been somebody else that killed Hennessey."

"Somebody else, eh! Maybe I can make you sure of that. You been talkin' about 'Hinky-Dink' Hennessey back in Chi, huh? Why, I know all about that. That was a Rutker gang killin'. They was in politics, too. It all came out a year later, when the Rutker gang was rounded up. It was in the papers—didn't you see it? You just happened in—lookin' for Hennessey or somethin'. Steady! Here's the fireboat come."

Grogan the fireman steadied himself. He was strong enough now, recovered from more than smoke; strong enough to give the fireboat crew a hand at getting the hose in. He reached down for it.

"Gosh!" said some one. "We thought you two was goners. You must have had a time in there."

"Just a bit of a nightmare," replied Grogan. To himself, he added, "An' my last."

Then, as he grabbed the nozzle and pulled the hose through the opening, he grinned, and said to himself:

"The wicked flee when nobody's chasin' 'em—ain't that in the Good Book? An' all because that medico give me a shave!"

THE END.

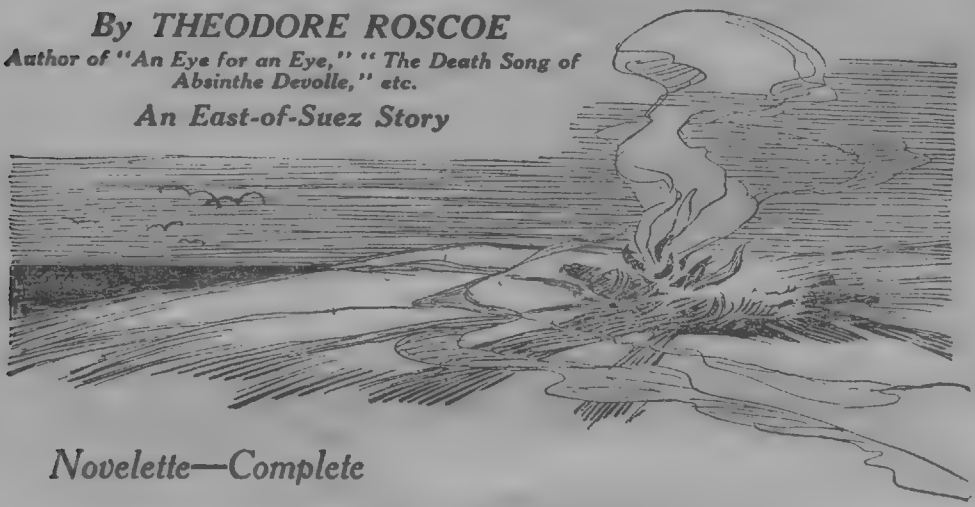
The Blue Cat of Buddha

Deep in the jungles of Siam was the treasure that had inspired a thousand Oriental legends; but Johnny Ash and his friend found the legends paled by the reality of the amazing guardian of the treasure

By THEODORE ROSCOE

Author of "An Eye for an Eye," "The Death Song of Absinthe Devolle," etc.

An East-of-Suez Story



Novelette—Complete

PROLOGUE

HOLMES BRADSHAW told me this story in Saigon, and I put it on paper as one of the strangest tales to ever come from that land where all stories are strange.

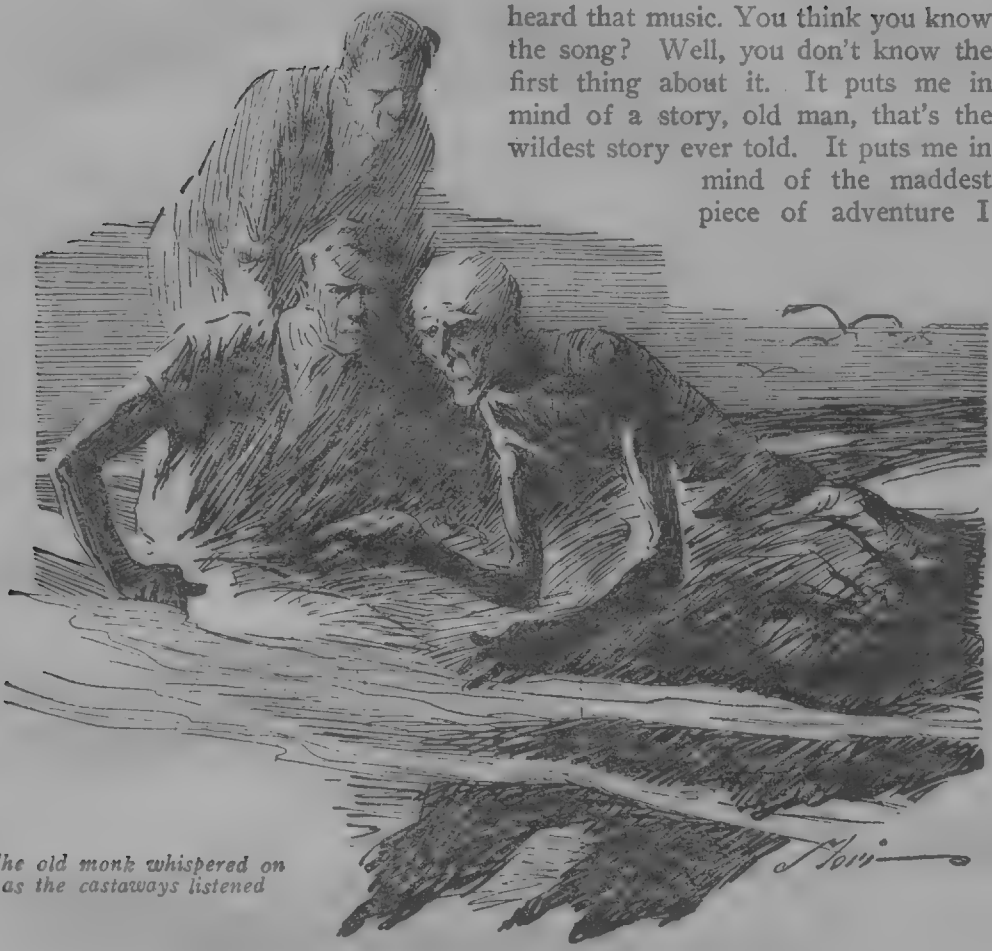
We were sitting out the evening on the Hôtel Napoléon III veranda, facing Rue Catinat; cozy in a corner away from the chatter of French colonials trying to play the social game in that Oriental hole. Suddenly, under shadow of his enormous pith helmet, Bradshaw's face went queer. His hand, in the act of conveying a virgin (vermouth and gin) to his lips, hung poised in mid-air.

"Listen!" he demanded.

I listened. Indoors, an orchestra had started to play for the dance. The pulsing skip-beat of an American fox trot throbbed out into the dusk. Bradshaw beat time with a toe, then asked: "You know that song?"

"Do I?" I rasped. "It's one of the things I came out East to escape. Jazz music. That bit of rot in particular. For the last two years that's all you could hear in the States—that song. Every stage on Broadway has shouted it. Night after night on the radio. The phonograph next door and the piano across the street. You don't know how they ride a thing like that in America. Two years. At first I rather liked the thing. Silly, but a bit different. Now I'd like to choke the bird who wrote it. He made a cold million off it, you know. It's *the* hit. They played it all the way over on the boat. Now I see it's got Saigon by the ear. Do I know it!"

The gaunt Kelantan naturalist chuckled, and drank. The jazz band swung into the nervous chorus, a saxophone convulsing the melody. Every loud speaker in America would be spouting the same thing that evening.



The old monk whispered on as the castaways listened

That song! Those six weird starting notes that swung into rhythmic ragtime so different ffom the usual you had to remember it. First you liked it. Then you hated it. But you couldn't escape the thing.

"Can't get away from it even in Asia," I snarled. "Bah!"

Bradshaw laughed. "You think you know that song, do you? Well, I know it, too. Two years ago I was in New York City. Went to see a big theater that was just opening. That little song was breaking on Broadway, and the theater featured the thing. The guy who wrote it sang it on the stage. I could have died in my seat when I heard that music. You think you know the song? Well, you don't know the first thing about it. It puts me in mind of a story, old man, that's the wildest story ever told. It puts me in mind of the maddest piece of adventure I ever knew. Draw up a chair and I'll tell you the yarn. Listen."

This is the story he told me:

CHAPTER I.

IN THE GULF OF SIAM.

TWENTY hours up the Gulf of Siam, the good ship Houri exploded a cargo of contraband hidden in her hold, and went off like a cannon cracker. I was standing at the rail when the blow came, and the jar knocked me off my feet. I slammed my face against a stanchion and went over the rail, unconscious as a log. And

I'd have drowned if the red-head hadn't been right there on the spot and saved my life.

Some mighty queer bits of humanity comb the beach down the China coast, but that red-head took the prize. I saw him first in Penang. I saw him again at Singapore; and later up at Hué. It's a bad road to travel if you don't go first-class; and most of them go down. The fever and alcohol get them first, then they take to opium for the finish. But (and he wasn't traveling first cabin, by any means) that red-head seemed to hang on.

He was singing for his meals in Penang, and his voice was a dead give-away. You know the type that sings at the sheet music counter in the five-and-ten? That red-headed Yankee was just the essence of that type. Thin and jiggly and nervous; clad in a tight-fitting pin-stripe suit pinched at the waist, a green shirt, a purple tie, miserable patent leather shoes. Fingers, yellow from nicotine-stain, snapping to keep dexterous time. A freckled, blue-eyed face under a weedy mop of hair the color of carrots. And a voice that came out through his nose, and made you think of Times Square, Forty-second Street, and the Subway.

He was singing his way around Penang, and I rather liked his grin, so I felt sorry for him. I always hate to see a Yankee stranded in the Orient. It's no place for any kind of white man or white woman either.

"He'll be hopped with dope in a month," I thought. But I was wrong. When I saw him next, at Singapore, he was only thinner and his shoes were breaking through. A seedy man at a café piano. But he was good at the piano, and still grinning.

He was still grinning and pianoing when I saw him in Hué, and his feet were bare on the pedals. I gave him money for his grin, and he told me something of his story. All those beach combers have stories, but his was original, anyway, and his voice from New York was worth listening to.

He'd been on Tin Pan Alley back in the Town. "Words an' music," you know. But his stuff hadn't clicked and the girl friend had given him the air. So he'd come out East to find a fortune. When he found the fortune he'd go back to the Street and lay it in front of that girl.

Why does every poor devil who sails through the Suez Canal think he's going to light on a treasure in the Orient? I think it's Kipling's fault, and you can get mighty sick of Kipling when you're down and out on the China coast. The romance is washed out of you in a week, and you start to walk down the Lane of the Happy Pipes.

That was where the red-head was original. He wasn't washed out, and he said he *knew* he'd find a fortune. He said it with a look in his blue eyes that made me feel sorry for him, more. A chap with eyes like those would probably die a trying. It's easy to die on the China coast if you're thin and hungry to begin with.

Well, I offered him some money to start him to the States, and he wouldn't take it. So I started for the States, myself. I picked up this tramp ship Houri a few months later, out of Soc Trang, down in the Mekong's mouth. She was bound for Bangkok, and I hoped to catch a Messageries Maritimes liner out of Bangkok for the West.

I had a hundred crates of specimens waiting for me up there in Siam; I wanted to carry them to France and then hop over to America for a vacation. I didn't want to go to Bangkok

on the Houri, but she was my only way.

THE minute I boarded her at Soc Trang I knew she was in a pretty rotten way. If she was a Houri then a lot of Moslems are going to be disappointed in Paradise. With her rusty hull, warped decks, and skinny funnel spouting cumulus clouds, she looked the lousiest craft out of the South China Sea, and that's saying something.

Her fore deck was jammed with a mob of Malay pilgrims bound for some distant shrine of the Sakya Muni and led by a bag-o'-bones Buddhist monk who was nothing but a symbol of Asia. His begging bowl, shaved skull, bare arm and yellow robe were regulation enough, but he had a voice that must have been loaned him by a wizard. He stood in the middle of his Sunday School picnic excursion and prayed a chant that wrapped a tentacle around your soul.

A fine crowd of fellow passengers! Their incessant psalm-singing got under my hide the first thing, and I was already uneasy when the Houri sneaked out on the flood.

The cockney mate and the big Dutch skipper who showed me to my cabin made me uneasy, too. The cockney was a warty little runt whose face showed the wear of the China coast on a soul easily worn. The Dutch skipper looked like six-feet-five of sin with his mast-thick arms, hairy chest tattooed with anchors and angels, and a face of beefsteak lighted by eyes like buttons stuck in cups of jelly and boil-points on either cheek.

Somewhere I'd seen that Dutchman's face before, and it wasn't in the Colony Club at Saigon. Somewhere unpleasant.

I was wondering about it as the Houri trudged down a rose-colored evening sea with the coast of Cambodia lying off her starboard beam. I won't forget that evening. The Malays on the fore deck below the bridge where I stood were going through a set of evening devotionals that made the racket of a Southern camp-meeting sound tame. A gang of mighty tough-looking sailors were hanging in the rigging of the fore deck mast.

I was wondering where I'd seen the Dutch skipper's ugly face before, and vaguely glad of the 9-mm. Lüger automatic back in my cabin. It was a new gun and a beauty. But it never did me any good. Even as I thought of it a terrific roar tore out of the Houri's bowels. The dusk was full of smoke and screams and scarlet light. The deck jumped under my feet. I rammed my jaw a smash against a stanchion, and went spinning into the Gulf of Siam.

Then somebody had an arm around my neck, and I was being towed through bitter water. I caught a glimpse of the Houri riding down a swell like a drifting garden of flames. Something would burst in her middle and geysers of fire would shoot up from her deck.

The water was full of trash and junk. A pink-faced rat swam by and tried to climb on my head. When the Houri sank the sea became black as pitch under early night. I tried to swim, but my rescuer had me fast around the throat, and I couldn't seem to move my legs.

We were an eternity out there in the Gulf of Siam before a rush of breaking surf got a hold on us. Then we were heels over head in a churn of rolling sea. I went under again, and came to lying face-up on a strip of sand that

seemed to be lost at the edge of the world.

A sick, round moon was sneaking out of a nest of green clouds, and the feeble rays disclosed a tiny beach backed by a steep bank of sand.

I caught a vague picture of my rescuer huddled over a mound of driftwood. Fire flickered in his cupped palms, and the wood began to blaze. Then he pivoted on his heel, and and I saw his face. A grin under a stack of watery red hair. That Yankee kid I'd last seen beating a piano in Hué.

I LET a few quarts of the Gulf of Siam spill out of my mouth, and got up on unsteady knees.

"Where in the name of Joseph did you come from?" I managed. "Of all the—"

"Right off the boat," the musician chuckled, wringing water out of his cuffs. "Business went bad in Hué, an' I got me a job on that tramp ship. Was I broke? Say! Sold everything I owned except this suit an' this little pocket lighter my girl back in N'York once give me. Now it's come in handy. Say, that darned ship went up like a volcano. Smugglin' powder, she was. I was one of her crew. Workin' up her foremast, I was, when she blew. I seen you on the deck down there and I was gonna speak to you first chance I got. I seen you down there, and lucky I had my eye on you. When that first blast came you shot overboard like a high-dive champion. I went after you, sure as hell you were gone. Maybe you think there wasn't a riot aboard that ship! Wow! But I found you O K...Ash is my name, chief. Johnny Ash. Johnny to you, chief. You're that naturalist, ain't you? Yeh."

He grinned as I pumped his hand vigorously.

"That's O K, chief," he said, as if he saved forty lives a day. "I—"

There was a scream. It came from out on the water and it echoed five times up the sand bank behind the beach. Johnny Ash went past me in a flying leap, dove into the surf, and was gone.

The moon crawled into a cloud and the only thing I could see was the patch of sand picked out by that handful of burning driftwood. Before I could decide to move my feet, Johnny Ash was back. Panting and blowing water, he strolled out of the combers.

When I saw what he carried in his arms I could have let out a yell. A marionette he carried; a skin-and-bones scarecrow with a face like a withered mangosteen—the Buddhist monk who had been leading that gang of pilgrims to a shrine up in Siam.

He laid the monk in the firelight, and we got to work.

"He was clingin' to a chunk of hatch cover out in the surf," Johnny Ash panted, working the monk's bony arms. "Goin' under and screamin' his lungs out. He fainted when I got him. Gee, he looks bad."

He looked just that. We emptied his lungs, flailed his arms and worked his legs, but we couldn't draw a breath out of him. His face was the color of old paper, his eyes squeezed shut, and his one-tooth mouth hung open like the mouth of a fish.

I gave him what first aid I knew, and then there was nothing to do but sit beside his inert frame. It wasn't pleasant to sit beside that huddle of skin and bones. The fire snapped, to cast dancy shadows down the narrow beach. The cliff behind the sand, the sky above, the Gulf of Siam were lost in a swirling, sceneless night. Our world was bounded by the reach of a smoky bon-

fire. It was the loneliest spot in the whole universe, right then.

Johnny Ash talked, because there was nothing else to do and no other place to go, while I thought dourly of my luggage and money sunk to the bottom of the Gulf. But I got snatches of what he said.

"The boat sank pretty fast. Most of the others got away, though. There were some lifeboats. We must 'a' come down pretty far on the tide. When the moon was up you couldn't see a thing out there on the water. Say, pal, this is real adventure, ain't it? You know, friend, I got a hunch I'm gonna find that fortune I once told you about. I been lookin' an' lookin'. I got a feelin' I'll hit it rich. Hit a fortune out here, see? Ever since I quit Broadway I've felt it, like. Queer, ain't it? Gee, I'd 'a' made good on Tin Pan Alley if I'd had a break. But your stuff has to be 'different' to click. Some new angle. New music. New lyric stuff. So I decided to leave the music world flat, see, an' chase up real dough. Somehow I got a hunch I'll find my treasure this trip—"

THAT'S the way the red-head chattered on while we dried ourselves around the fire and the monk was an unpleasant mummy on the sand. And you can believe it or not, but when Johnny Ash let out the words: "Got a hunch I'll find my treasure this trip—" that old bag-o'-bones monk suddenly sat up with a jerk that almost startled us over backward.

He sat up with a jump and a queer sigh, opened one milk-white eye and fastened it on Johnny Ash. I tell you it was weird. And maybe you think what he said didn't give that red-headed lad a nice shock.

"You shall find your fortune," he said in English. "Yes, *tuan*. By the oath of Buddhasatva next to come, you shall find a treasure out here. I will tell you how, *tuan*. I am dying, but before I die I tell you how. You saved me from the water bravely. You I shall reward, with a fortune."

I saw Johnny Ash's face go blank with surprise, and it got under my skin, too. But I shouldn't have been surprised at anything coming from a Buddhist monk. One of those apostles of Gautama had once argued Kant and John Stuart Mill and Monroe Doctrine with me in a lousy Yellow Sea backwater; and I'd met another one who'd traveled the world around and could speak forty tongues and looked like a dried-up witch.

So I wasn't bowled over when the monk spoke English. It was the next thing he said which almost knocked me off my feet. He got a twig-like hand on Johnny Ash's arm, and his white eye glowed like a planet.

"I shall tell you how to find," he whispered, "the treasure of Buddha's Blue Cat—" And with that he fell back coughing.

I almost fell back coughing, myself. Buddha's Blue Cat! The treasure of Buddha's Blue Cat! Wow! You have heard of it if you've ever been east of DeLesseps's canal. They whisper of that treasure from Stamboul to the Shamu Desert. They talk of it with bated breath in the *serais* of Kokhand and in the taverns of Mozambique.

Every man and his brother who ever mapped a trail between Port Said and the Kuril Islands has heard of the porcelain image of Buddha's cat that sleeps in a Cambodian jungle with a fortune under its paws. They've probably tried a shot at it, too; and a good many of them never came back. Some said they died of fever in the jungle.

Others said they disappeared; vanished from the face of the earth. Any Malay coolie or Annamite *pousse-pousse* boy would tell you they'd been eaten by the Blue Cat.

And the treasure was supposed to be still there, hiding around somewhere, unrifled! I knew any number of men who would give their ears to hear the first thing about the Blue Cat shrine. And here was this grisly old dying monk telling Johnny Ash he would show him how to gain the Blue Cat's gold. Lordy!

"For the Blue Cat guards the fortune with a secret one must know, *tuan*," his sepulchral voice was quavering on. "Thousands have never found the gold. Many more have failed with the treasure in their clasp. They did not know the secret. But I know it well, and will tell it to you, O *tuan* of the red hair. Because you save me I will reward you thus. Listen."

JOHNNY ASH listened, and I had my ears out stiff as tin. The Yankee from New York and I crouched over that poor devil of a monk, and listened as if we were going to hear the secret of the universe.

The monk fixed his eye on the redhead's face, reared up on an elbow, and started a story. The fire snapped accompaniment. Wisps of wood-smoke wreathed about his shriveled skull. He had just the right atmosphere for his tale, and made the best of it.

Could he tell a story? Æsop and the garrulous Kalif of Ghand were tongue-tied compared to him. He was a troubadour and a minnesinger and an orator of acme degree, let me tell you. Waving a bony hand to shed queer shadows on the sand, he let his curious voice climb from alto to soprano, drop to bass and below, whisper weird as the winds in the lost caves of the Garo Hills as he chanted the legend of Buddha's Blue Cat.

Siddhartha Gautama (sang the monk) on becoming the Buddha, won the confidence of the people, and they all hastened to put their money in his keeping. This found him traveling through Cambodia with a bag of gold on his back bigger in size than Mount Langsho. Now the citizens of the countryside were outrageous thieves, and so troubled the Buddha he must needs rest himself under a banyan tree and figure out a way to bank his gold for good.

While meditating in the banyan's shade, he chewed the leaf of a lotus blossom and inspiration came. *Presto!* and he had conjured up a subterranean vault suitable for the storing of his enormous treasure. *Presto!* again, and he had called to his side a huge blue cat. Admonishing his cat to eat all and sundry who attempted to rob the vault, he mounted the cat at the cavern door to guard the fortune in gold.

Many had come, and the cat had not gone thin. In fact, it had grown big and fat. But alas! from sitting so long in the fierce Asian sunshine, the cat had gone blind. From crouching so long in one position it had petrified and turned into porcelain. Accordingly, it was sore as the devil at Buddha, and if the right person came along and did the right thing, the Blue Cat would tell a secret—show him how to get into the vault where the gold lay hidden.

That's the legend the skinny monk sang from his one-tooth mouth, and he sang it mighty well. Especially well did he sing of the gold in the cavern. Gold enough to make the hoardings of Midas the Phrygian and Crœsus of Lydia look like the savings in the stocking of a fishmonger's wife by compar-

ison. Gold nuggets and bars and *tikals* and beads and amulets all stuffed and sorted in bags. Bags of gold dust and bags of gold coin. Lordy!

He sang so well that Johnny Ash and I, stiff where we crouched, forgot we were lost on an unknown strip of beach. We forgot the monk was dying. We forgot everything. Our eyes were dazzled by visions of a cave stuffed with a fortune in gold; and when the ancient monk told us the Blue Cat shrine was not so far from where we'd landed on that beach, we almost fell on our faces.

"SO the Blue Cat sits in the jungle at the door of a little shrine," the old monk whispered on. "And it is not far from this beach, *tuan.* There is a village named Lua Kapong. The shrine of the Blue Cat is near the village. Not far away. Look you, *tuan.* This beach I know well. Years ago I sat praying on this very bit of sand. Behind us stands a cliff. There is a trail up the cliff. Yes. A trail leading to Lua Kapong where sits the Blue Cat. I can smell it, *tuan.* I know. The Blue Cat is near. It is not far—to Lua Kapong."

Lordy! Johnny Ash was making sounds in his throat. My mouth seemed full of sawdust. Before the monk could say more a spasm of coughing tortured his withered body. Blood bubbles floated from his lips. He must have been hurt internally, for the coughing turned his face grass-green, reared him on his elbows and poised him, gasping. Then he sank back with a whistly sigh.

I tell you, it was shivery on that little beach with the moon gone out and the dark closing in, blue-black, and the smoky fire crackling to send macabre shadows flitting down the sand.

"Listen!" squawked the monk with sudden strength. "*Tuan* of the red hair, you who saved me from the watery death—listen, *tuan.* Go you to the shrine of the Blue Cat. Mark well these words: *Give the cat a right eye that can see,* and the cat will point the way to find the gold! When you find the gold, *do right.*"

The dying man coughed so hard you could almost hear his bones rattle. When he spoke again his voice was a whisper's echo.

"Do you remember. Give the cat a right eye that can see! Find gold! Do—do right." His voice was a croak. "I die now. *Tabay, tuan—*"

His lips moved, but no voice came. His lips grinned. His eyes clamped shut. His cheeks sank into purple wells; body flattened into the sand; mouth yawned open. The solitary tooth glittered bleakly in the shifty fireglow. The monk was dead.

Johnny Ash looked at me; his voice struggling out of a white mouth. "Bradshaw! You heard what this guy said? Did you hear him, pal? Do you get it? A cavern cram full o' gelt! A fortune! I knew it, pal! I knew I'd hit a fortune out here. Wow! A cave stuffed with gold an' nothin' to stop you takin' it save a cat made outa crockery."

And a few other things. I saw them, and let out a startled yell. The red-headed kid jumped around fast, but he wasn't in time to see what I saw. They were gone when he looked; but I'd seen them, no mistake.

The sweat crawled out on my forehead, and I glared at the wedge of brushwood masking the foot of the sand bank where it dropped behind the beach. The light from our expiring bonfire just reached those bushes and made hot coals of the six pairs of eyes

in the six faces I had seen peering through the undergrowth.

SIX faces like a row of devil-masks hanging in the brush! Six faces with open mouths and burning eyes, distorted from the effort to listen!

The first four faces I didn't recognize. But the last two I knew. One was hook-beaked, scabby, leering—the face of the cockney mate of the ill-fated Houri. The last in line was a slice of beefsteak, sin-pocked and grinning, with piggy, lusting eyes and flamy boil-heads atop each high cheek-bone. The face of the Houri's big Dutch skipper!

Nor was that all. The cockney had a hand up under his chin, and in that hand was a knife that gleamed like a giant needle, catching straying beams from the fire. And the Dutchman had a fist to part the bushes, and in that fist was a monster automatic.

That wasn't all, either. The minute I saw the Dutch skipper's face, this time, I remembered where I'd seen it before. A poster in the police bureau at Singapore. That grin above the salient legend: "Dirk van Deventer. Wanted for murder." No wonder I let loose a howl.

Johnny Ash spun around as I yelled, and the faces vanished. I got a hand on the red-head's arm.

"Did you see 'em?" I gasped. "In the bushes over there. They must 'a' seen our fire from where they landed farther up the beach, and sneaked up on us. Six of them. The skipper and the mate from the Houri. And four others."

"The crew! There were only five of us workin' the deck—"

"Yes! Hiding there in the bushes. You get it? They hid in those bushes and overheard everything that monk told you about the Blue Cat. And the mate carried a knife while the Dutchman had a gun."

Johnny Ash stood stunned. Then he made a dive for the underbrush, with me after him. I rather expected a burst of automatic fire would greet our charge, but nothing happened. We thrashed into the bushes and couldn't find a single human being.

We found tracks, though. Those six had sneaked out quiet as a troop of tigers, but they'd left a trail. I snatched a torch out of the bonfire and looked over the ground.

Footprints in the damp sand showed where the crowd had hidden, and marched away to a path mounting the bank behind the beach. It didn't take any little bird to tell me where those six mariners were heading.

As I stood staring at the footprints, the red-head's hand smote me hard between the shoulder blades.

"Come on, brother!" he hollered. His blue eyes blazed behind a tossing sheaf of carroty hair. His words came shrill with excitement. "Let's get goin', pal. We're off. We're goin' to Lua Kapong—"

With that, he sprinted up the sandy trail. The gold rush had begun!

CHAPTER II.

THE BLUE CAT.

LUA KAPONG is not a village. It is not. It is a smell. It smells like a *durian,* which is an Oriental fruit smelling worse than those little bombs American urchins throw on Halloween night.

A bilious, sluggish river crawls seaward through a jungle suffering from gangrene; and where the stream squirms clear of the trees, it spews

broad mud banks. Lua Kapong chooses to squat on the mud banks.

A scribble of native huts perched high atop poles, looking for all the world like queer birds stalking across the muck. A *cul-de-sac* of nasty Chinese bungalows. A scatter of European sheds abandoned to spiders. A backwater alive with flopping crocodiles and the stink of dead fish. A tropic sunshine sucking skyward evil steam to sour the local air. A decaying wharf, a decaying oil tank, a decaying hotel run by a decayed Leo Restoul, *propriétaire.*

What a place! When I saw that Asian garden spot, I suffered no doubts about the dying Buddhist monk smelling its inland trail from the beach.

I give you my word, I never wanted to go there. I wasn't anxious to join a fortune hunt with four tramp sailors led by ruffians armed with knife and gun—fellows who looked capable of stabbing their mothers for a plugged franc, and grinning while they did it—whereas I was armed with nothing but malaria. Furthermore, the Blue Cat shrine had proved a fatal monkey-business for some of the toughest adventurers down the China coast.

The more I thought about it, the less I liked the idea. The monk had said he'd give away the secret to the treasure; but what had he given away? As far as I could figure, he'd handed out nothing but a lot of Oriental epigrams. "Give the cat a right eye that can see. Find gold. Do right." What did that rot mean? All very illuminating.

But the red-headed Johnny Ash had started for Lua Kapong at top speed, and there was nothing I could do but follow. He'd saved my life, so I had to stick by him.

I chased him up the trail and we plugged off through the jungle side by side. He wasn't going to let any six men or any sixty men rob him of his fortune, and you can't talk to a Yankee with red hair and gold in his soul at the same time.

We got to Lua Kapong just as the sun was climbing like a blazing chariot wheel out of the East. Johnny Ash spied the decaying hotel down by the river's edge; raced me through the steaming *cul-de-sac* right up to the hotel's sick veranda.

A score of *kra* monkeys were chittering on the veranda roof; a lemon-faced house boy snored on the front step; and a man with a face like a Christmas pudding leaned in the dowdy doorway. This was Leo Restoul, *propriétaire.* A pudgy, corpulent Frenchman spoiling in that tropic backwater.

Johnny Ash, who had some coins in his belt, hired a room and dashed indoors to look around. I stayed for a talk with Monsieur Restoul.

You understand, I had no use for this treasure hunt affair. And I'd conceived a bright idea. There would be river boats bringing mail up to Lua Kapong, and I'd get Johnny Ash away on the first river boat along, before the bullet or blade of a competitor dodged into his reckless head. The red-head had saved my life, and it was up to me to save his.

BUT the Frenchman laughed soprano when I asked him if the Messageries Fluviales steamed through to Lua Kapong. River boats! But, *Sacré Dieu!* The mail boat had left only yesterday. There would not be another one along for three months. The only way out of Lua Kapong was an overland trek through the jungle—a hundred hard-fought miles to Kampot, the nearest port away.

The Frenchman laughed when he told me the news. I could have punched his nose. I had even made a fist, when Johnny Ash danced out of the door, caught my arm, and led me into the hotel.

Inside there was a smoky room fouled with tables, slinky mongrel dogs, an American bar under a broken electric fan shrouded in cobwebs. Six figures were hunched at a corner table, and six faces grinned at my entry.

And there I was, with the red-head; marooned in the middle of a treasure hunt.

Well, nothing happened for a week. (Things started to happen on the eighth day, though, you can bet your life on that!) But the first week was full of nothing save apprehension, malaria, and daily trips out to the shrine of the famous Blue Cat.

The path to the shrine started at the other edge of town; wandered through a grove of *kaladang* into deep jungle. Across marshy, dankish fens where rags of mist held fever over stagnant pools. Through thatches of clumpy bamboo, batches of lime and cycas. Down a ravine choked with vines and rotting trees covered with fungi.

Like an artery into the very heart of Asia that path led, bringing up finally to a wall of shale that jutted abruptly out of the trees. A steep wall of shale that made a fence to a region of hills which rolled off eastward beyond the jungle, rugged where the sun would rise.

At the base of this cliff grew a forest of *mohors* where monkeys swung; and the Blue Cat sat under a banyan tree. The banyan was old as sin, digging a thousand gnarled fingers into the moss about its many roots; and the Blue Cat crouched facing a little Buddhist shrine scooped into that cliff of shale.

The shrine in the cliff was some three feet deep and nine feet high, its floor paved with flat green stone, its interior walled and roofed with panels of eaglewood that must have been carved when Buddha's wife was still wondering if he'd ever come home.

Stones, cobwebs and moss dripped through the fusty wood of the shrine's ceiling, but the wooden back wall was intact, dead with great age, stained dull. I've seen some pretty smart pieces of carving in my day, but I've never seen wood wrought in the fashion of that paneled back wall.

Hundreds of tiny figures, figurines, knobs, paradigms, flowers and symbols were cut in intricate pattern across the panel, worked in an intricate design that would have made shamefaced the cabinet-makers and wood-carvers of the Middle Ages. Impossible to describe the thing. It was a design to make your eyes water.

THE porcelain cat was something wonderful, too. Only in Asia can you find such a thing. Mystery? The East knows how to brew one for you at every turn. That image sitting silent and calm in the heart of a jungle a million miles from nowhere was one of Asia's weirdest jobs. It would have taken modern sculptors three generations to fashion such a thing, and forty engineers, an army of workmen and a modern railroad to set it up there in the jungle.

A cat *couchant*, stretched out lazy on a marble pedestal, arched back some ten feet above ground, and thirty feet long from its tail to the paws curled under its chin. What a cat! And made of cobalt-blue, chinalike porcelain that must have been fired in the furnace of a master ceramist. And invented in the mind of a maniac.

You know the Chinese love for the bizarre. You know their images. That cat was covered with scrolls and little horns, knobules and cornices; grinned a mouth full of scissory teeth, fiercely, in a face of incredible design; and stared with eyes like empty saucers at the shrine in the shale cliff. That was the Blue Cat.

And right there in front of the Blue Cat, standing in awe and with nerves tingling, Johnny Ash and I were checkmated.

"We aren't going to find any fortune," I reminded, "or even a smell of one until we figure out what the monk's dying words meant. Give the cat a right eye that can see. Maybe you can do it, Ash, but I confess I'm no surgeon. And I don't like fooling with this cat, I can tell you. A lot of boys have come out here hunting gold and never been heard of again. Besides, we've got those six criminals from your boat to contend with."

Johnny Ash stood fingering his jaw, trying to puzzle out the monk's tricky sentence. He examined the right eye of the Blue Cat, which was just like the blank eye in any other image. Then he examined the Blue Cat from stem to stern. After which we went over every inch of the ground under the banyan, and finished up inspecting the shrine.

A few lizards crawled around to stare at us. Juicy spiders scuttled down the wood panels walling the shallow shrine. Our inspection resulted us nothing.

"I've got a certain feeling," I told my companion, "that six ugly sailormen are hiding in the bushes around here and watching us the way cats watch sparrows. Maybe it's a good thing we aren't finding the door to any Aladdin's Cave. Listen, Ash. We better give up this nonsense, and make tracks out of town. I don't like it here a little bit."

"I don't, either," he grinned. "But that monk said there was gold hanging around, an' I'm gonna get it if anybody does."

We didn't get it that day. We got nothing except sunburn. The same on the following day, although I'd sat up all night with a sweet dose of fever, and Johnny Ash sat up all night trying to figure out the monk's little puzzle.

First thing in the morning we went out to the Blue Cat for another look at its problematical eye. Other visitors had beaten us to it. We found the tracks, but no other sign of them. Johnny Ash spent the morning staring at the porcelain image, and I spent the morning waiting for a bullet to buzz out of somewhere and knock me down.

THE same for the third and fourth days, and no results. And the affair began to wear on my nerves. Those strolls through the jungle were no May walks to begin with. Never in my life had I heard a place as quiet as that jungle was. I've been lost alone on the desert of Oman and tramped the forgotten hills of the Hindu Kush, and I thought those places were quiet. But they were shouting market-squares compared to that rank jungle where the Blue Cat crouched.

The stillness in there was thick as steam. Monkey gabble only emphasized the quietude. Snakes slipping out of black pools made a noise. It got under one's hide.

And then there were those six lousy ruffians from the Houri. They sneaked around the hotel with grins on the side of their mouths, giving Johnny Ash and me shrewd glances, whispering among themselves, stealing off by

themselves through the town, watching. Watching. Always watching.

They watched us, and we watched them—each waiting for the other to make a move. Remembering the cockney's knife and the Dutchman's automatic, I didn't like the game at all. Six against two, and the Dutchman had already given himself a name for homicide.

The thing almost had a humorous angle. We all lived together in Leo Restoul's scabby hotel; ate together in the same room. The seamen ate at one end of the room; Ash and I enjoyed our rice and wine at the other.

We watched, I repeat, the sea dogs; they watched us. The skipper and the mate bossed the others of their crew; and I have every good reason to remember those four deck hands. One was a Russian with a Nihilist's beard and a rum-blossom nose. One was a swart Spaniard with brass rings dangling from enormous ears. One was a Senegambian black; face darker than anthracite, tattooed lips split in a monstrous watermelon grin. One was a Scotsman with a livid scar bisecting his mouth and Chinese eyes under sandy brows.

Johnny Ash coolly told me they had been a tough crowd in a forecastle, and they looked twice as tough out of one. Put them altogether and they didn't spell "mother," by any means.

"Don't worry," I said. "Every time we sneak out to that Blue Cat, they sneak out and watch us. They keep a man posted there all night, I can bet. Look here, Ash. It would be a swell stunt if we cleared out of Lua Kapong. We're almost out of the few coins we had in our pants. We better hit overland before some snake decides to strike."

I said that more than once. The redhead's reply never varied. He would take out his pocket lighter and start the tiny flame. "The girl who give me this is waiting for me to bring her back a fortune. I'm gonna find one out here. The monk fixed it up—gave us the dope."

"Gave us hell," I would say. "Dumped us down in the middle of a jungle backwater in the midst of a treasure hunt with a gang of escaped murderers. We'd be wise to clear out. Who can figure the monk's lingo, anyhow? We all squat around that hotel like a lot of ninnies, foreheads wrinkled, eyes blank in thought, brains churning. Trying to get the meaning of a fool yellow mendicant's puzzle-problem."

"I'll find that fortune," was all he would concede.

And for a whole week we discovered no cavern jammed with gold, or anything else of value. For a week nothing happened. Then the eighth day the Russian sailor vanished and was never heard of again.

CHAPTER III.

DEATH AND THE EYE.

IT was the Spaniard who started asking the whereabouts of Bonstamski, the Russian, early afternoon of the day the Slav vanished. That started the negro and the Scotsman going, and they asked the cockney mate and the Dutch skipper.

When the Russian didn't turn up at twilight the Dutch skipper came over to ask Ash and me about it. It was the first time any of that crowd had spoken to us in Lua Kapong. He simply asked in a gentle Dutch voice if we'd seen the Russian. We gently advised we had not.

By midnight the whole native quarter was out searching. It's not so easy for a man to vanish from an isolated community. But friend Slav might have dissolved into thin smoke. His sailor friends looked scared. I was mystified. Johnny Ash said nothing. Leo Restoul raved because the man had paid nothing on his bill, and said:

"*Parbleu!* There is a shrine near here called the Blue Cat. Those who go near it are eaten by the image. That is so. It has happened before. Those fools. They come here hunting gold; expecting to see it lying around. I tell them there is no gold. They stay. They hunt. Then one day they vanish. Without paying the bill!"

As if we did not know!

The Scotsman with Oriental eyes was next. Johnny Ash and I spent the day inspecting the shrine and mulling over the monk's puzzle. I knew the Dutchman and his gang were watching us; I could hear them in the tall grass under the *mohors.* If they watched us they didn't see anything.

And that night the Scotch beach comber wasn't to be found. The big negro and the Spaniard, the Dutchman and the cockney hunted high and low, through the town and into the jungle. Leo Restoul hunted. Johnny Ash and I wondered.

None of the natives had seen the man since noon. *Mynheer* the skipper claimed he'd left the Scotch beggar sitting on the hotel veranda. The Spanish brigand said he'd last seen the Scotty strolling off through the *kaladangs.* It was all very queer.

"Say," Johnny Ash pointed out to me that night. "You suppose them guys could have found gold and beat it with the treasure?"

"Not on your life!" I told him. "That Dutchman keeps one of his men watching the next one all the time. Either he or his cockney mate is out watching the shrine all the time, too; I've decided that from what the hotel keeper, here, tells me. The Dutchman and cockney are only in the hotel together at meal time, see? Then, either one or the other goes away somewhere. To the Blue Cat, if I know anything. And you can bet they keep an eye on those sailors. Then how could that Russian and this Scotch fellow have disappeared? Don't ask me. But let me tell you. You heard what the Frenchman said about it? Me, I'm all for getting out of here before one of *us* does a vanishing act."

"You mean start a tramp overland?"

"You bet your life, kid. I'm fed up on this fortune hunt."

"I'll find the fortune!" he grinned. "I know I will. I'll hit it before those other devils do, that's sure. Just gimme time."

Time! Nine days in a steaming tropic hole. Nine days in an out-of-the-world jungle, glaring at a porcelain idol. Nine days in a frowzy hotel, being watched and watching, striving over an idiotic little puzzle that might mean anything or nothing whatever. I tell you, I was sick to death of it. Two men had apparently been wiped off the picture. Who would be next?

The big Senegambian negro was next!

He made it three in a row. His footsteps could be trailed, though. They walked up the path leading to the Blue Cat and disappeared under the banyan tree.

I could hear the Dutchman talking about it to the cockney and the Spaniard on the veranda that evening. Ash and I were in the hotel. The three on the veranda sounded pretty scared.

The Dutchman told the Spaniard to go out to the Blue Cat and stay there all night in hiding, to see if either Ash or I showed up at the shrine. The red-head and I overheard that plan, and we stayed in our room all night.

At times we could hear either the Dutchman or the cockney talking with the French hotel keeper on the veranda below. All night they kept at it. In the morning, the Dutch skipper showed up with a pallid face and something like terror in his eyes. The cockney was looking pretty green around the gills, too.

The Spaniard—the last of their crew—had disappeared; vanished under the banyan tree during the night. Johnny Ash gave me the news; said the fat Frenchman had given it to him.

"THAT Spig is gone, too," the red-head informed me over our morning coffee, behind the closed blinds of our room. "You heard 'em send him out to the shrine las' night. Well, the cockney went out lookin' fer him this mornin', an' he wasn't to be found anywhere. Say, if this keeps up we won't have any competition at all—"

"Ash!" I said, getting him by the collar. "I'm through. I know the Orient better than you ever will. Something happened to those four sailors that isn't on the books! They're dead as hell, or I miss my guess. And so will you and I be, if we stick on this fool job. That monk handed out a lot of trash, and it's just lucky we weren't the ones to get it in the neck. Now we're going to clear out of town. To hell with the Blue Cat!"

I was mad clean through, and about as scared as I ever hope to be. Something was doing out there near that shrine. Something had done away with those four tough sailors, and I wasn't going to stand by until it did away with me.

Besides, I was getting up to my neck in malaria, sick of the vile hotel fare, and sick of hearing the red-head trying to solve the monk's Oriental puzzle.

"We've wasted eleven days in those rotten jungles and this lousy hole. We haven't come across a sign of gold. Now we're going to wash our hands of it all. Our money's gone and we'll have to sneak out. Have to sneak, anyway. If that Dutchman and his pal spotted us leaving town they might think we'd found the gold, and try to knock us off. I'm for fighting with nobody. You get me, Ash? We're going out of here to-night—"

All day I argued with him about it, and at sunset he broke down. I guess the vanishing of the four sailors wasn't sitting too well on his stomach, either. Our hide-and-seek with the Blue Cat and the ruffians from the Houri was too nerve-tweaking for even a song writer from New York City.

So we crept out of the hotel just at dusk, without the Frenchman seeing us go; pocketed a few provisions, spending our last *piastre* at a Chinese trader's in the middle of the *cul-de-sac;* and turned our steps for the trail by the river.

Neither the cockney nor the Dutch giant had been in the hotel when we left, and we were confident of making a get-away. I knew the red-headed kid was sick with disappointment, and I didn't say anything. I, myself, would have enjoyed stumbling across a fortune in gold, had it been there for the stumbling. It wasn't going to be any fun to trek down the river broke and beat a trail back to Saigon like a penniless tramp.

I was thinking of the world in no dulcet terms as we threaded our way through the *cul-de-sac* of the town, heading for the riverside.

"Curse the Houri for a boat," I said to myself. "Curse the Blue Cat!"

As I said that, Johnny Ash made a grab at my sleeve and yanked me into the shadows of an evil-smelling mud hutch. Out of sight just in time! The lane we'd been treading had been deserted to mongrel dogs, mud, and mist wreathing up from the river. Now a man had popped out of an alley, and, keeping in shadow, hustled up the lane ahead of us.

"The cockney!" Johnny Ash whispered.

The words weren't off his lips before a second man darted from the alley and flitted down the shadowy lane, hard on the heels of the little mate. There was stealth in the movement of this second man. Like a stalking gorilla. And when I realized who he was, ten shivers trickled up my spine. That was the big Dutch skipper.

A fat round moon was just riding up into the sky, and the lane was full of blue shades and pallid light. The cockney walked nervously, fast. The Dutchman flickered in and out of shadow.

"Come on!" Johnny Ash breathed wildly. "Something's up now. That runt in the lead is headin' for the path to the Blue Cat."

The cockney ducked up a narrow byway. The Dutchman followed the cockney. Johnny Ash and I followed him.

IT was lonely down in that end of town. Most of the natives lived on the mud near the old French hotel and spent their early evenings gambling away their shirts in the Chinese quarter.

Here were abandoned sheds and shanties, rambly empty bungalows and shacks that had once housed Europeans avid after petroleum and tin. The Europeans had gone, and their works were not standing up against the hand of Asia. Sheds and shacks leaned broken with decay; peopled with nothing but ghosts. A gloomy district.

Where the village ended on the edge of jungle stood a sheet-iron warehouse, dilapidated and empty. The Dutchman caught the cockney just as he reached the warehouse. The cockney voiced a squawk of dismay; there was a brief, violent struggle; then the big Dutchman dragged his captive through the warehouse door.

With nerves ajangle, Johnny Ash and I crept down the lane and stole on tiptoe up to the warehouse. Creeping along the rusty iron wall, we could hear clearly the cockney's dolorous whine:

"Now Dirk! Don't! Ow! Yer gonna kill me? Wait! Wait, ol' man! Ow! Yer chokin'! Lay off, Dirk! What's it yuh wanna me—attackin' me like a bloomin' thug!"

A harsh laugh sounding like the rattle of nails in a brass bucket drifted from a window cut in the iron wall above my head. The harsh cacophony snapped quiet the cockney's whine; and brought a mist out on my forehead.

Once before I had heard a similar laugh. One afternoon I'd seen a colonial soldier yank his revolver to shoot down a baby orang-outang which had been squealing in a tree overhead and annoying his siesta. The monkey's mother had dashed off with the corpse, squalling in anguish. Her cry would have torn the heart of a Kameroon witch doctor, but that soldier had guffawed.

It was just such a laugh as the Dutchman in the shed managed to give. The cockney gurgled out a wail of fear. Followed the sound of scuffling. Was the skipper murdering his mate in cold blood?

Sweating, Johnny Ash and I raised our heads; moved to a position which commanded a view through the little window. The bright moon was high and the lane beside the shed was lighted with moonshine. This made our station at the window more than hazardous; but it also afforded us a picture of what went on in the warehouse, for a shaft of yellow beams washed down through a hole rotted in the roof and served to illuminate the barn.

The Dutchman had the cockney backed against a wall; his massive hands fastened on the limey's wrists; a brutal knee driven into the limey's stomach to pin him fast.

From the window the Dutchman's face could not be seen; but moonbeams picked out the cockney's countenance in bold relief. The little mate wasn't leering like a tough, now. You bet he wasn't.

His eyes were glowing with fear; his raffish mouth twisting with pain. He seemed to be clutching something precious in his captured fists; and sweat dripped down his cheeks as if his temples had been melting butter.

"Let us stop the foolishness, *ja!*" the Dutchman was growling. "I haff no time now to waste. Come, little friend. You haff been double crossing your old skipper, eh? So! I know it. Last night I sent you to watch the Blue Cat, *ja.* And back you came with three gold pieces in your fist, eh? You hid them in the belt you haff. You did not guess I was every night searching your belt, eh? So. Where did you get the gold? How did you get into the treasure vaults and where are they found, eh? Tell me, little roach, or by the bones of Peter van der May, I will twist your throat until your neck breaks! Tell me!"

MAYBE you think that speech of the Dutchman's didn't have the two of us at the window staring pop-eyed. The little cockney was squirming, impaled on the wall by his captor's knee; his voice burbling in his neck. Seeing murder in the Dutchman's eye, no doubt, he exhaled a howl.

"Wait. I weren't gonna double cross you, Dirk. Honest to Gawd, I weren't."

How the Dutchman laughed.

"You ain't gonna, now, anyhows. It iss all so funny. I was leaving you live last of all, because I never guess you'd haff the brain to figure out the secret of what that old monk said." (Johnny Ash and I sweated chill water when we heard those words, believe me!)

"*Nein!* I did not guess you would learn the puzzle, my friend. Ho, ho! That you wass smarter than us all. A joke. So! I kill those others one by one and hide their bodies in the banyan tree to get them out of the way. Later I should kill you, eh? Why should I divide any treasure with five others, ha? But I leave the two fool Yankees live because Yankees are smart. They, I think, will be the ones who figure out the puzzle. I watch them do it and then take the prize away from them. Never would I guess it wass you who would get first to the gold. Come, then. How did you get the gold and where? You tell me now or I kill you so. *Ja!*"

He twisted the cockney's wrist. The cockney yowled; and something happened. His tortured hand flew open and three gold coins jingled on the dirt

floor at his feet. I saw them. The red-head beside me saw them. The Dutch skipper saw them. He screamed a red hot curse when he saw them, too.

Three gold coins. Gold! Three little golden disks glinting dully in the moonlight.

Then something else happened. The laughing giant of a skipper gave a sudden wrench on his captive's other wrist. The fingers of that hand spread open, and another object rolled, flashing, across the dirt. What do you think it was? A *pocket mirror!*

The legs almost gave out under me as the monk's words darted through my mind. "Give the cat a right eye that can see!" A pocket mirror!

Johnny Ash started to whisper, but he didn't have time. *Mynheer* the skipper had snatched up the mirror, caught at the little mate's throat, and sent him spinning across the floor.

"Ho-ho!" the Dutchman snarled. "So that is the eye! Come then, my friend. You will take me to the Blue Cat and show how it works. You will take me to the gold." He launched a kick at the cockney's spine, and the miserable little man let out a cry of anguish.

"Take me now, limey. And no tricks, *nein.* You try to fool Dirk van Deventer, again, and I will snap your neck in two, see? Quick! I am impatient. Let us go!"

CHAPTER IV.

TO THE TREASURE!

ARM in arm the pair tramped out of the warehouse and started up the path through the *kaladangs.* They passed within thirteen inches of the place where the red-head and I crouched hiding in the weeds.

Lucky for us, the Dutchman didn't see us there. Bad business if the big skipper had spotted us just then. He had his automatic clamped in his fist, and the expression on his face as he stalked by was not nice to see.

My heart was banging all over my chest as I got to my toes, and, scuttling where the steamy shadows clung, went after them. Johnny Ash was white-faced, but he wore a grin, and his blue eyes sparkled. He looked a little mad with the moonbeams in his red hair. I must have been a little mad, myself, or I'd never have gone up that jungle path.

If that jungle was bad enough in daylight it was villainous at night. The lush roof of foliage defied the moonlight and spread a mantle of darkness that seemed to sweat in the torpid heat. Snarling roots, capsicum brush and gluey mud made traveling a contest.

The jungle didn't want visitors that night. It wanted to belch and steam without human intervention, and it fought like the devil to stay and betray the progress of our boots.

Only the racket made by the two in the lead saved our following feet from being heard. Van Deventer's pungent curses and the little mate's shrill cockney oaths spit out a continuous clamor. The Dutchman would yell for more speed and wrench his captive's arm. The cockney would squall in pain. The Dutchman would laugh his scarlet laugh.

That was a murderer's laugh, and I never wanted it to presage my own funeral. It didn't seem to bother Johnny Ash. It was all I could do to keep that red-head behind me and quiet.

The path seemed to wander for miles that night. The jungle was hot, but I was chilled with sweat when the shale cliff appeared as a moonlit shadow

above the treetops, and the pair in front gained the *mohor* forest.

The trees weren't so thick in there. Pools of yellow moonlight lay on the moss below the vine-clad limbs. Rags of malarial mist wandered like wraiths among the tree trunks.

If ever I saw a rendezvous for ghosts, that moon-illuminated grove of *mohor* trees was one. Only the men hustling up the trail ahead weren't ghosts. One was a wretched little vagabond with the taste of death in his mouth. The other was a giant Hollander with gold-lust in his soul, a godless laugh in his black teeth, and predatory hands anxious to claw at a treasure.

WHEN they reached the clearing where the Blue Cat crouched under the ancient banyan directly beneath the cliff's frown, Van Deventer yanked his victim to a halt, and the red-head and I dropped flat in a tangle of underbrush.

The worthy mariners stood at the head of the porcelain image. Johnny Ash and I were not fifteen feet away. For a moment the Dutchman growled in hoarse undertone. During the interval the red-head spraddled tense at my elbow stuck his hand under my chin and tilted my face upward.

"Look," he whispered softly. "Overhead. In the upper branches of that banyan. Above the cat."

The moon was a canary-yellow wafer behind the tangle of gnarly limbs, and etched with faint light the outlines of the four things roosting in the topmost branches. Black against the sky they hung, and at first I thought they were buzzards.

Buzzards! Sweat poured out on my face. I remembered the Dutchman's words, spoken in the warehouse. I hadn't quite caught them, then, but I caught their meaning now.

Slowly the four dangling figures turned, swinging on cords that hung them by the neck. The Russian, the Negro, the Scotchman, the Spaniard. Van Deventer had killed them, and hung them high in the banyan tree to hide!

I think I gasped like a radiator valve, for Johnny Ash slapped a hand across my mouth.

"Watch 'em, pal. The cockney—"

I turned my gaze from the horrid sight in the tree in time to glimpse the Dutchman and the cockney duck into the shrine scooped out of the cliff base. Like a spotlight turned on a stage, the moon sent a shaft of beams slanting into that shallow shrine. The two stood facing the back wall, the cockney running his fingers over the lacy woodwork.

As I watched pop-eyed, the back wall swung inward with a senile moan. Dutchman and cockney disappeared. The wooden panel hissed back into place.

"Come on!" snarled Johnny Ash, and we crept close.

I give you my word, I didn't want to go on. I didn't like that soundless jungle. I didn't like those four cadavers hanging in the uppermost branches of the banyan against the tropic moon. I didn't like the diabolical china cat with the pocket mirror set into its right eye.

"Give the cat a right eye that can see," had said the monk, "and the cat will point the way to the treasure." The cockney mate of the Houri had guessed out the problem. That little mirror—obviously filched from Leo Restoul's scabby hotel—gleamed like an optic in the cat's preposterous porcelain face.

And pointed the way to the treasure!

Johnny Ash and I stared like fools. The porcelain image faced the shrine in the cliff, and the looking-glass set into the right eye of that image mirrored a tiny portion of the shrine's back wall; picked out a section of the involved and intricate diagram carved in the wooden panel.

Never in the world could one have found it, otherwise. But by looking in the mirror one could see it as solutions make easy what seems a difficult trick. An arrow, carved in the wood, pointing to a little wooden lever.

I tell you, it was ingenious. The red-head flung around from the face of the porcelain cat and leaped into the shrine. But I was standing in the way of the mirror, and he couldn't find that carved arrow to save his soul. It had melted into the pattern; seemed to vanish.

The mirror, you see, made it seem to appear in that section of the carved paneling where it wasn't. He snapped on his pocket-lighter and fumbled over every inch of the wall. Only then did we realize we must watch the mirror in the cat's eye, watch the reflected picture, and move our hand until the mirror showed it on the arrow.

Have you ever tried looking over your shoulder into a mirror and attempting to place your finger on a reflected object? That was the trick. Stare straight at the wall of the shrine and your gaze was lost in a confusion of Chinese patterns.

My mind was on that gibbet of a banyan tree and the Dutchman who had made it so. But Johnny Ash's mind was all for finding the arrow in the panel, and he found it. His finger touched the tiny lever, and a portion of the panel swung inward. He gave a laugh as the panel swung to reveal a yawning tunnel mouth that bored like a hallway leading deep down to hell.

A STALE breath of fetid, dank air whispered out of the tunnel and stirred my hair. A smell like the smell of an opened tomb. Age-lain dust coiled up in the wind and a thousand disturbed ghosts from vanished yesterdays went whispering down the dark-hung tunnel walls.

"Gosh!" ejaculated Johnny Ash. "If the wise guys back on Tin Pan Alley could only see this! Gee!" He grabbed my hand. "Come along. Get goin'!"

"Do I look crazy?" I rasped. He might well have said I did! "You think I'm going down that tunnel after a man who's just murdered four sailors and is wanted over in Malaya for a fifth murder? And we haven't got a weapon on us."

"I'm going down there," the red-head growled. "That monk said I'd find a fortune in here, an' I'm the guy who's gonna get it. To hell with that Dutchman! Who's afraid of a gun? He can't see us in the dark. Come on, brother, and get your share!"

I was afraid of a gun and made haste to confess the fact. But I went on just the same, and I got my share. You bet I did. More than my share! But I wasn't going to let that fool song writer from New York go first, and he wasn't going to go last. So we traveled side by side.

The red-head let the panel swish back into place; then he snapped on that infernal little lighter his girl safely home in New York had given him, and left it standing at the base of the wooden door.

"This tunnel may branch off, an' that light 'll come in handy, in case we have to locate the exit in a hurry," he

suggested with great cheer. "All ready, pal. Say, it *is* black as pitch, ain't it?"

Blacker than pitch. The feeble, puerile blaze of the lighter died out hastily as we fumbled our way down that subterranean corridor. Soon we edged around a turn, and Stygian darkness closed in behind us. Lordy! was it dark?

And everywhere that fusty smell of age, rot, long-lying dust. The dust was a real enemy, too. It clouded under our sneaking feet and kept me in constant nervous fear of a nasal explosion. A good old-fashioned sneeze in that situation might have meant a ticket to Paradise. Impossible to tell how far the Dutchman and cockney were in the lead. It made my spine shiver to think of them.

If I've ever done anything foolhardy in my life it was the time I crept down that hall of midnight, trailing that armed Dutch assassin. And the only weapon urging me on was the fear that a red-skulled jazz hound from New York would think me craven. Wow!

Perhaps the tunnel meandered for a mile. Perhaps ten thousand miles. I, myself, think I crept through that blind and perilous darkness for a score of æons. Every forward step had the heart bounding under my ribs.

A thousand times I started to sneeze and held it back with an effort of will mighty enough to stop the world on its axis. Darkness, dust, the odor of antiquity and things long entombed, somewhere at hand a murderer with a gun.

Scared? I confess it without a blush. Only a fellow with carrot-hued hair, freckly-faced grin and a voice from Broadway would not know enough to be scared. I could have kicked his shins!

Eventually there was light. Gradually the darkness faded into a peculiar amber-colored twilight that revealed the tunnel as a corridor walled with ancient wooden panels and floored with dust-carpeted flags. At once it was a blessing and another danger. And where the devil was it coming from?

It was while I hunted the source of this illumination that I first discovered the mirrors. There was one set in the wall where the tunnel made its next twist. It caught my picture as I approached, sneaking; I thought it was a man stalking toward me and almost yelled.

Then I saw that this mirror was set in position to catch the light thrown from a glass farther down the tunnel. The glass shed light reflected from still another series of mirrors which seemed to be catching light from a shaft in the tunnel roof.

Farther on, the corridor was similarly lighted. Light from a shaft dropping from the hill's surface far above was tossed from mirror to mirror for the faint illumination of that underground trail.

Moonlight. I tell you, it was weird, startling and remarkable. A device invented by a genius who must have worked it out while Buddha sat in trances under *bo* trees. Another piece of 500 B.C. engineering, possible only to a country like Asia. Remember, the Chinese were making glass while Europe combed its hair by staring into a pool and America was learning the use of fire. How those mirrors got into Cambodia from China was something else again.

But there they were in the tunnel, and there were Johnny Ash and I. Again, there was the Dutchman with his cockney mate. Now we could plain-

ly see in the mouse-gray dust blanketing the tunnel floor.

JOHNNY ASH hurried after them, chuckling; abruptly his chuckles stopped and he voiced a queer croak.

The tunnel had begun to zigzag like a puzzle box, and we stumbled across *it* at the second sharp turn. It lay directly under one of the light shafts, sprawled flat on its back, its crimson visage staring at the tiny points of moonlit sky visible far above. Scarlet threads leaked from its ugly leer. Its left temple had been bashed to a pulp by the handle of, say, a heavy automatic. It was, of course, the body of the little cockney mate!

A vicious curse escaped Johnny Ash.

"That Dutchman did this job. Wanted the treasure for himself alone. Do you see this, pal? Say. I'm going to get that louse an' get him good."

Johnny started to run. His blue eyes were diamonds in his face and his jaw came out a foot. Mad? I should say he was mad. The knuckles showed white on his fists as he pounded along the tunnel; and I raced after him with the fear of the Lord in my heart. He'd forgotten his fortune, now. He only wanted to get the brute who could strike down a man in cold blood.

The tunnel was getting lighter at every turn, and mirrors were everywhere. Suddenly we came to a turn where the u n d e r g r o u n d corridor branched off into six other lanes. My companion raced straight ahead. And then we were sprinting through a regular rabbit-warren of intersecting hallways. twisting, turning, dodging that way and this, running us round and round.

At once we were lost in a wild confusion of interlacing paths. Mirrors at every angle in the walls added to the madness of the place. Have you seen those crazy-rooms in American amusement parks? You get into them and can't find a way out. That was the way with this subterranean *cul-de-sac;* and it didn't take me long to realize we were lost in a clever little Chinese trap. It might take us ten years to find the right path out of there.

Chance alone led my feet down the corridor leading to the cavern. There was a door visible at the corridor's end, and I flung it open with a prayer that it might lead us into the main tunnel, again.

The old wood casement moved with a hollow groan. Dust smoked under my hands and rust flaked from hinges fashioned before the days of Athens.

The red-head and I stumbled over the door sill together and never heard the old door slam behind us. Blind, we stood. Dazed. Stunned.

It was like plunging at one leap from night into day. Ali Baba admitted to the den of the Forty Thieves could not have been as astounded!

What a cavern that was! Fancy a room fifty feet broad and a hundred long, its ceiling thirty feet above the floor, and the whole made of glass. No opium smoker's dream could have conjured such a picture. The room was illuminated by a single shaft in the ceiling which dropped a p o o l of moonbeams that were scattered by a thousand mirrors.

That room was a madhouse of mirrors. Walled with mirrors. Mirrors set in the ceiling. Mirrors set in the floor. So that the cavern seemed to wander off into a thousand similar caves, and the occupant saw himself standing in a thousand different attitudes in as many different rooms.

Only one spot in that amazing, demoniac vault was not covered by a

looking glass. The end of the room was piled high with lumpy leather bags. And that dying monk on the beach had not exaggerated. He had not. He had told of a fortune to rival the fanciest fortunes of the world's richest kings, and there it lay.

Gold!

It spilled from those time-rotted sacks in glittering cascades. It lay in gleaming mounds on the floor. It fell in spirals, coils and loops between the piled, decaying bags, shining as only gold can shine and catching and throwing moonbeams through the myriad fantasy-rooms pictured on the mirror-hung walls.

Gold dust, gold coin, gold amulets, gold tikals, gold bars and cubes and nuggets big as cherries. The treasure of a Cambodia dead before Angkor Vat. Lord above, what a fortune!

And the only spot in the room not covered by a mirror, I say, was a strip of sand that lay across the floor like a brown carpet stretched before that monstrous pyramid of riches. A strip of sand some thirteen feet wide, reaching from wall to wall and so on for miles into the mirrors.

Exactly in the center of this carpet of dull brown sand, his back toward us, his face toward the golden treasure, stood the giant Dutch skipper of the Houri. His automatic hung in the fist at his side. The handle of the automatic was bloodied.

CHAPTER V.

HIDDEN DOOM!

THE red-head and I couldn't have made a noise or stirred a muscle if we had been stabbed by a needle. There was only one sound in that amazing vault—the stertorous breathing of the Dutchman who stood glaring at those gold-stuffed leathern sacks. He hadn't heard our entry. He was feasting on that stupendous fortune; eating it with his eyes while the wind snored out of his lungs.

Then a Dutchman's curse slipped from his teeth; he flung out a lusting hand and snatched a bag to swing it on his shoulder. Ropes of muscle jutted on his bare arm and he swung sack to back with the ease of a stevedore picking up a loaf of bread.

That bag was heavy, too. He grunted under its weight, and a little trickle of yellow dust leaked from a broken seam in the leather.

Then he flung around and saw us!

Never in my life have I seen such an expression of bull fury come to the face of a human being. The man was a gargoyle standing there on that carpet of sand at the other end of the cave. Every nerve in his face contorted to make it a mask of rage.

His great, black-toothed mouth split in a horrendous grin and a savage oath rumbled out of his chest as his eyes went s c a r l e t with venom. Sinews bulged on his tattooed forearm as it gestured to shift the weight of the sack on his shoulder.

The gun springing up from his belt made a dull flash, and its blunt muzzle spouted white flame as it fired. The quick shot clanged like the slam of an iron door in that underground cave. The result was a melodious smash that rang out like a stroke on a gong.

Do you know what happened? I knew it even as I jumped aside with a shriek and spilled in collision with Johnny Ash. That Dutch fiend hadn't shot at us. He had aimed at a reflection in a m i r r o r ! His flaming gun had smashed a panel of glass.

Right then I discovered an astound-

ing thing. We ourselves had not actually seen the Dutchman. We had seen a mirrored reflection of the man and the carpet of sand and the bags of gold. To this day I do not know whether we were even in the same room with him or not. That amazing cave was nothing but a trick looking-glass room.

Can you imagine yourself trapped in a chamber walled with mirrors? You go to run and come up crashing against glass. You turn corners and find yourself face to face with your own reflection. In one corner you seemed to be in a long room. In another corner you were face to face with a mirror.

I could glimpse Johnny Ash's phantom shape dodging in a thousand reflections. I could see the Dutchman standing there with the sack on his back and the gun waving in his fist.

My brain whirled. My betrayed eyes went dizzy. I didn't know whether the enemy was behind me or in front of me. His gun spouted sharply and spots of glass showered into fragments with a harmonious smash—each separate mirror smashing with a different tone. But he was only shooting at our reflections.

Himself, he stood planted there on the sandy strip of floor. One—two—three he fired. The room sang with the echo. I dodged and sprawled and banged my face against glass screens. And then I saw something else. Something to bring another squawk out of my neck.

The Dutchman's feet were gone! Gone, I say. He didn't appear to notice it. He was wildly trying to sight with his gun; bewildered; cursing with rage. But his feet had disappeared in the sand.

Even as I watched—did I see him or a reflection in a mirror?—he sank to his knees. In half a moment he was down to the hips and screaming.

Then I understood what had happened to all those adventurers who had found the gold and vanished from the face of the earth. That sanded carpet was a crust over a well of quicksand. The weight of a man alone would not break through the crust. But the added weight of a heavy sack of gold would cause the holder's boots to break through; and he would be lost in the sucking toils.

Perhaps the cockney had guessed that trick, too. That was why he had carried away with him, on his first visit, only a palmful of coins.

I SAW the Dutchman drop his deadly burden and fight to free his legs. Too late. The ponderous sack sank almost immediately. That sand must have been like gluey water.

Screaming wildly, the Dutch skipper struggled like a madman. His frenzied squirming drove him under to the armpits. I tell you, it was one horrible picture. He knew he was gone, and he wanted only to get the red-head and me. He shot the last three slugs from his automatic with desperate speed.

Panes of glass fell crashing. Powder-smoke clouded the air. The last three echoes clamored away like gong-notes.

The Dutchman's chest was under. The sand had him by the throat; choked quiet his terrible outcry as it closed over his mouth. His face vanished. Quietly the lethal sand rippled over his head.

One upraised hand clawed horridly at the air; went under as a knotted fist. And the deady brown carpet was undisturbed, again.

I heard Johnny Ash's voice howl-

ing behind me, and spun around to find him there in flesh and blood. Sweat was dropping from his chin; wiggling out of the red wig on his skull. His cheeks were the color of grass sprouting under a dead log, but his grin wasn't gone and his fingers were strong on my wrist.

I didn't know what he was saying, if anything, and I wanted only to get out of where I was. There were slivers of glass sprinkled around at my feet; brown blobs and patches where bullets had knocked six mirrors down from the wall; and I wanted to get away from the view of that empty brown carpet stretching before the piles of gold.

Luck played me an ace card. The barren patch of wall at my elbow was the only reality in that place of death and illusion, and I leaned a sick body against it. Promptly it fell outward. The mirror which had once been there had concealed the back of a door.

I went through the door at a bound, dragging the red-head after me. It closed gently; and we stood in the half-light of one of those many underground passages through which we had trailed. Somehow we began to run. I remember laughing with hysteria. And I remember Johnny Ash suddenly stopping me, and yelling:

"Say. We'll run around in these passages for years. Listen. You remember what that monk said for us to do after we found the gold? 'Do right,' he said. I got his idea now. Come on."

Chalk up one for that song-writing kid from Broadway. Of course he'd hit the idea. Do right! That was the monk's way of telling us to take every turn to the right once we got out of that vault. We took every turn to the right.

Somewhere we jumped over the body of the cockney where he lay murdered, grim and grinning up at a light shaft. Then we were back in the main tunnel, sprinting for all we were worth, only anxious to get as far as possible from a mirror-tortured cave with its carpet of doom.

I had caught my second wind by the time we reached that portion of the tunnel where it was dark. JohnnyAsh was clattering along at my heels, and we raced like Olympic relay men.

"SAY," I heard him yell, "can you smell it?"

I should say I could. Smoke! The dark was choked with smoke. Wood-smoke. Somewhere up ahead there was a fire. I recalled the red-head's pocket lighter placed at the tunnel's ancient door, and I squalled.

Now we really ran. Embers floated like fireflies about us and soon the smoke became a throttling rope around our necks. A nice little climax to end one lovely night's adventure in hell. That pocket lighter which was to guide us back to the world had set fire to the exit.

We rounded a corner, and dashed into a blazing funnel. The ancient wooden door of the tunnel was crumbling in varicolored flame and tongues of fire were lapping along the tunnel's paneled walls and ceiling with a joyous crackly noise.

The red-head and I tore through that last burning section like projectiles, I swear. No sprinting champions ever made a faster finish. We rushed through the merry bonfires, sprang through the fiery door and hurled ourselves into open air with sparks glowing in our clothes and embers singeing our hair.

And not a split minute-tick too soon,

either, for a second after we lunged from that blaze-wrapped tunnel-mouth the shale cliffside fell with a tumultuous roar. Like the collapse of a fire-eaten section in a mine.

Those flame-ravaged walls fell in and the cliff tumbled down with a bawl. It spilled like an avalanche over the mouth of the Buddhist shrine. It poured down in a flood of sliding earth, shouting with that valiant rumble that only falling hills can make, heaving and bounding, hurling rocks and bowlders and pebbles and clods, raising a mighty bouquet of dust.

The shrine in the cliff was buried deep, lost under tons of earth. The porcelain image of Buddha's Blue Cat was shattered by winging rocks.

Johnny Ash and I, as though mummified, stood at a distance and watched the destruction. When it was done a streak of rose was glowing on the eastern horizon and the echoes were dying in the jungle, ripe with dawn.

The body of the Blue Cat was a mound of china fragments. But the head had been knocked off clean as a whistle by a flying rock.

Drawn by some unfathomable impulse, my companion and I tiptoed up to have a look at that crazy head. The pocket mirror was still jammed in its eye. Cracked down the middle, that mirror was, and with the glass turned skyward it caught a perfect picture of the four things hanging above in the aged banyan tree.

EPILOGUE

BRADSHAW sprawled back in his chair, reached a hand for the bottle, and tossed down the gin with a queer laugh.

"So the kid from Broadway didn't find his fortune after all," I remarked, for something to say.

The gaunt naturalist laughed, again. The orchestra in the hotel had launched into its final number, and was playing once more the popular song that had, somehow or other, started my friend on his incredible story. Now he sat chuckling, tapping time. Then he said:

"That's the story, old man. Johnny Ash and I made tracks back to Lua Kapong. Remember the old warehouse on the outskirts? The tin shed where the Dutchman wrenched the confession out of the cockney? We had just about enough presence of mind to stop in there and pick up those three gold pieces the little mate had dropped. We gave two of 'em to the French hotel keeper, and that scorpion fixed us up with an outfit to trek overland with. When we got to Kampot on the coast we sold the other coin to a French collector, divided a hundred dollars between us, and hit for civilization. I went up to Bangkok, and I don't know where the red-head cleared for.

"I got to thinking, up in Bangkok; about that fortune buried under that hill back in Lua Kapong. Incidentally, I sent an outfit back to dig for it, and they dug for a whole year and couldn't locate anything but mud. They couldn't find the light shafts or the tunnel or anything. Later, a geologist told me the whole underside of that cliff and that hill must have been rotten with quicksand. The landslide had started a general undermining, and that damned cavern might be halfway to the middle of the earth. As for me, I wouldn't have gone back to that place in person for all the money in the world.

"So I hit for New York to forget about it. I landed in the States some months later than I had expected; and the first person I ran into was Johnny Ash. Listen! A Rolls-Royce cruised up to the curb where I was loitering.

In front of the Astoria, it was. And who should step out from behind a swanky chauffeur but that red-head himself. I said, 'What the hell?' That kid looked like a million dollars, you understand. A cool million!

"'Say,' I barked, 'did you go back and get that fortune out of there?' He just grinned, and said: 'Pal, come to this show to-night and see me afterward!' And handed me a theater ticket. I went to the show. He came out on the stage and warbled that song. The hit of the year. The Broadway smash.

"'I'm cleaning up a fortune on it!' he chuckled to me afterward. 'Do you get it, pal? Remember! Say, I *knew* I'd find a fortune out there. Wrote this on the boat comin' home, and I'm makin' a fortune out of it.'

"Can you beat a guy like that? You bet I remembered. The first six notes of that song will haunt my dreams till I die and make 'em bad. Why, the six starting notes of his little ballad were the sounds of that Dutchman's bullets smashing those mirrors in the treasure cave. Sure. Weird notes. The echo of breaking mirrors. And the red-head remembered 'em an' wrote 'em into a million-dollar song. Wow and Lordy!"

Yes; when I came to think of it, those notes *did* sound like breaking mirrors. Modern jazz always wants something new. And what a song it was! Of course, the words put it over, too. The red-head had named it cleverly:

"I'll See You in My Broken Looking-Glass!"

THE END.

Texas-Shy Bank Bandits

IN 1927 the bankers of Texas, in convention assembled, voted to pay a reward of five thousand dollars for every robber killed in the act of robbing a Texas bank, or in actual pursuit thereafter. In a little less than eighteen months they paid out thirty thousand dollars. Laconically they say it is cheaper all around to kill a bank bandit than to catch and try him. There is a big saving to small counties and the effect on bad men is colossal. In the past year there has been but a single bank robbed in the State and that bandit was caught.

One thing is universal in Texas—all men, even in cities, are acquainted with firearms, and it is a rare Texan who cannot and who will not shoot straight and fast. With this to build on, peace officers and bank agents organized in each city a sort of vigilance committee, the members of which kept guns beside desks during business hours. Alarms, sirens, phone and telegraph signal systems were installed, tested and proved efficient. Then Texas sat down and waited for bank robbers.

When a "job" was pulled, the hard-riding, fast-shooting Lone State man hit the grit and went to work in the niche assigned to him. Of a consequence during the past two and a half years the bank robbing racket in Texas has had quite a slump. Texas is on its toes, and the banks are making and keeping their money. Five thousand dollars for a dead man, paid quickly and paid without quibble, has done the trick. *Clem Yore.*

"Framed?" the detective snorted. "Aw, pull something new!"

Caged

Framed by an unscrupulous agent of the underworld, young Joe Barry battles overwhelming odds as the Law inexorably railroads him toward the electric chair

By COURTNEY RYLEY COOPER

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

JOE BARRY comes from a small Missouri town to conquer New York—and finds Broadway indifferent to a country lad and his accordion. Friendless, he hits bottom when he is fired from his job as entertainer in Louie's cheap spaghetti restaurant, because he had yielded to the lure of spring to escape from his slum lodgings and spend a day and night wandering in the country around Newburgh.

An occasional patron of the restaurant picks him up in his car, and calling himself a Wall Street attorney, Martin, offers the discouraged youth ten thousand dollars to step into the shoes of a client of Martin's, accused of violating the Jones Act. Martin gives Joe a thousand in cash, tells him the sentence would only be a few years.

Joe, who would just as soon die as continue his slum life, and sees this as a means of escape, agrees to Martin's proposition of thinking it over during a day's holiday in the country, and promises to meet Martin at his own lodging at midnight.

This story began in the Argosy for March 15.

He goes to a Pennsylvania circus for his holiday, and is pressed into service to fill in for a missing accordion performer at a radio broadcast. He is deeply interested in the circus life, and hates to lie to Sue Dayton, the equestrienne, and her Uncle Dan, who owns the circus; but he tells them his name is Joe Bradley, and that he will have to see about getting out of his other job before he can accept their offer to go with the circus.

Going back to New York determined to turn Martin down, he enters his room at midnight—and is almost immediately arrested by police.

CHAPTER V.

NEATLY FRAMED.

INSTANTLY hands began to paw about Joe Barry, pushing his arms awkwardly half upward as they rubbed hard beneath his armpits, as swiftly to go downward, to his coat pockets, his belt, even to the knees of his trousers. All the while the other two men merely stood there, hands in coat pockets, their eyes set on his eyes, like a boxer watching an antagonist for the telegraph of a coming blow. Then the voice came again:

"Frisk his east and west for a fountain pen."

Eager hands went to Joe Barry's vest pockets, poking industriously there. A curt laugh came from behind.

"Leave it to Pete and his cock-eyed Australian slang."

"Yeh, and this fountain pen stuff."

"All right about that fountain pen stuff." This time the voice came out of the haze before Joe, accompanied by a bantering laugh. "The old Bottle and Stopper plays safe with these babies!"

"I think that fountain pen stuff's the blah," came a fourth voice.

"Think it is?" asked Pete. "Well, I've seen 'em. Look just like a fountain pen, only of gun-steel with a hole in the end. Other end screws off for the cartridge, and screws back on again. The filler's the trigger and they'll shoot hard. Too hard for this old Bottle and Stopper to take chances. Well, Kid," came with sudden variance, "all flossed out in a new fiddle and flute!"

The direct address seemed to jerk Joe Barry from his numbness. For the first time he truly saw the men before him, clean-shaved, well-dressed persons, like business men.

The one whose slang amused the others held Joe's attention; he was a tall, almost genial-appearing person of about fifty; the sting of his remarks was tempered by a grin which easily slit the corners of his wide mouth. There was a hint of the Irish in his blue eyes, sharp, penetrating, somehow kind, yet impersonal.

Joe did not define the word in his mind—everything was too blurred. But it struck him nevertheless, the impersonality that surrounded all this; the way he was treated, the remarks, one to the other, as though he did not exist as a human element, the business-like way in which he was gone over and handled, as though he were a commercial product to be examined carefully before shipment.

Then the wide-mouthed Pete moved forward, made another remark in rhyming slang about his suit, and with a quick motion of a strong forefinger, flipped out his tie.

"Let's turn over that new lamb's-fry, Sport, and see where you bought it." There was no label on the under side. He jerked open Joe's coat and his vest; then poked back the collar.

"Cheap-john, eh?" said the detective impartially. "Don't have your trick fronts tailored like the other boys. Give me the lean and fat."

He answered his own command by taking Joe's new hat from his head; it contained no retailer's marks either, and he set it back again. The various actions seemed to clear Joe's brain; at least they removed the numbness which had held him gawking since he had opened the door. He looked about him wildly.

"I don't see what you're doing all this for. I'm not guilty of anything."

"NOBODY ever is," said Pete.

"But I'm not. I'm not, I tell you!" He twisted in his excitement. A detective jerked him back to immovability.

"Don't throw a fit about it."

"But you're going to accuse me of things I didn't do. I was going down and explain everything—"

"Oh, there's something to explain?" asked Pete, raising his eyebrows. "Well, we'll ride you down and save you the walk. That's service, isn't it?" Then over Joe's shoulder: "How about it?"

"Feels clean," said a detective from behind. A hand rammed into Joe's right trousers pocket, then poked itself forward under his arm, displaying a wadded fistful of small currency.

"Want to look over this soft?" he asked them. "Better cuff him?"

"Yeh." Pete seemed to have something of authority. "Give him a pair of 'em. Jake, you and Jerry take a ring apiece."

Joe began to protest again; then his voice ceased with the dumb wonderment of why they should jerk his arms down like that, and why a man on each side should clamp a cold yet burning handcuff on him, each fastening the other bracelet to his own wrist. Again he began:

"Please, I haven't done anything—"

Pete moved past him without answer.

"Fan the joint, Ed," he commanded. Then to Joe: "What all you got in your shovel and broom here, Kid? The room, the room, the shovel and broom!" he added to the blank look of his prisoner.

Joe Barry shook his head desperately. His eyes had taken on the dull finish of a tired animal now.

"I haven't got anything in here."

"Oh, you've got something. There's a bed and a bureau." He nodded toward it. "Open 'er up, Ed."

A drawer scratched open. There was a rustling of paper, and a slight sound of tearing. Then Ed's voice:

"Pete—hey, Maxwell!"

Pete Maxwell turned from a survey of the washstand drawer.

"Yeah?" he asked and going beside the other man knelt for a moment. Again there was a sound of tearing paper and a slight pause. The detective at Joe's right grunted.

"Something hot?" he queried of the two men at the bureau. Pete straightened.

"Yeh," he answered. "A Tomcat and two heaters."

Joe looked over his shoulder; he had not understood the slang; he only knew that he saw three packages wrapped in brown paper which had not been there when he had left that morning.

"That stuff's not mine!" he snapped. Pete paid no attention. Joe turned first to the right and left, desperately. "I don't know anything about those packages. I never saw them before."

"Yeh, they probably climbed in the window," said the man called Jake.

Pete had placed them on the top of the bureau now. They gave forth a heavy, metallic sound. Again Joe broke forth.

"They're not mine, I tell you! I never saw them before!"

"They must be important," said Jerry. "You're all boiled over about 'em."

"I don't know what they are, but they're not mine. They're not mine!" he cried.

Ed shrugged his shoulders.

"Then why get so excited? Maybe they're marshmallows—or cream puffs."

Joe twisted against the hot clasp of wrist-steel.

"I don't care what they are. They've been put in here to get me in trouble." A word came to his lips, one he had been searching for. "All this has been framed up. I've been framed—framed—"

"Oh, hell!" said Jerry in a tired voice. "Pull something new."

"But I've been framed! I've been—"

"Tell that rat to shut his dummy mace!" called Pete Maxwell. "A fellow can't think with those L trains as it is. Who's that on the stairs?"

THE two detectives went swiftly forward, dragging Joe with them.

"Oil your ankles down there!" called Ed, and the pasty-faced group of lodgers, crowding the steps at the second floor, shuffled uncertainly. Ed scowled. "Shake it, I said!"

They retreated from the landing then, mumbling into the shadows. Swiftly the two men at the bureau went through the other drawers, apparently finding nothing. Then Pete rose and jerked loose the string which held Joe's bundle of old clothing.

"Getting all set to make a lam, eh, Sport?" he asked. "Good trick—just carrying a bundle instead of a suitcase. What you got, Ed?" he asked of his partner, on his knees and fishing under the bed.

"Shoes with country mud on 'em."

"Bring 'em along." Then he noticed the gray, creased clothing which Joe had discarded on the return from his first trip to the country.

"Rained on," Pete said, and screwing up his genial features, stared at a loose piece of wall-paper, hanging from the ceiling. "Yeh, that's right. Night before last."

It all meant nothing to Joe, quivering in his bonds. But suddenly it did.

"I can prove where I was night before last!" he said.

"Fine," answered Pete. "That makes it easier." He was going through the old suit now, at last to claw deep into a pocket and grasp something there. His hand came out with some difficulty; currency seemed to bound from his grasp as he placed his find on the bureau.

"More soft!" he exclaimed. Then with an innocent look at Joe Barry, "Do you have it everywhere around this joint?"

Suddenly he bent and examined the money, and pulled a memorandum book from a vest pocket. Joe launched into new denials.

"I never saw that money before. I don't know where it came from."

"No?" Ed asked lackadaisically, and picking up another bill, mumbled the numbers to Pete. The detective on Joe's right took out a cigarette and begged a light from his partner, the blaze giving Joe Barry's clay-like features a peculiarly mottled appearance as it traveled before him. Again Joe asserted hopelessly:

"That's not my money. I don't know where it came from."

"Maybe we can help you find out," said Pete quietly, and continued his search of his notebook. In a few moments his work seemed completed. The men turned to other investigations about the room. They heaved the mattress over, and ran their fingers along the dusty sideboards of the bed. They shook the old gas-lit chandelier, and unscrewing the brass bottom plate, stared up into it. They looked under the broken balloons of veneering on the old bureau and examined anew the ancient washstand. At last, their work apparently completed, Pete Maxwell turned to his charge.

"Aren't a junker, are you?" he asked incisively.

"A what?" Joe Barry had never heard the term before. Pete pressed his lips with good-humored exasperation.

"Can the kindergarten stuff. Got any junk around here?"

"Just what old junk you see."

"Smart, aren't you?" asked Ed.

"I'll draw pictures for him," interjected Jerry. "Junk!" he said, and imitated the action of jabbing a hypodermic into his arm. "Never even heard of it, eh, Sport? Junk, snow, happy dust."

"If you mean cocaine or morphine or anything like that, no!"

PETE MAXWELL cocked his hat, gave the room a final survey, and finally brushed his hands.

"Give him the bell," he commanded of the two men at the door. "Ed and I'll stay here and give the place another run over. Tell the Royal Mopper we'll be down in about twenty minutes."

Joe Barry whirled, bold with desperation.

"Why don't you talk English?" he burst forth. "Four of you, coming up here and trussing me like I was some sort of a wild animal! Four of you—why didn't you put guns on me or beat me up! Yelling this gibberish at each other so I can't understand. I don't even know if you're detectives—coming up here and flipping back your coats—talking to each other so I won't know what you're saying—"

"Then, Spirit of Innocence," answered Pete Maxwell with an impersonal grin, "honest to God we're policemen. And we're going to take you to the East Twenty-Second Street Station House where the captain, or Royal Mopper, as my crook friends in Australia would have it, will hold conversation with you after we get there. Is that plain enough or shall I write a book about it?"

Joe remembered little but the crowding and the clattering noise as they went down the stairs. Once on the sidewalk, with faces pushing eerily in and out of the shadows about him, he looked for a patrol wagon. There was none; only a sleek-appearing touring car, with drawn side-curtains and a glow from crimson headlights.

A jangling bell began to sound after the machine had started, drowning out other noises. Soon the machine stopped, and he was led inside a building, to a desk where a white-haired, disinterested man in shirt sleeves asked him questions and wrote the answers down in a book, to the accompaniment of a second searching process.

Then the locks of the handcuffs clicked raspingly, as a barred door closed behind him, and another man in shirt sleeves, fat, disinterested, impersonal, took him by the arm. Joe noticed that his heels clicked hard now, with metallic sharpness.

Then he saw rows and rows of

barred places to his right, faces peering out at him; closer, near the light, a drunken mercantile sailor, stripped to the waist and blue with tattoo-marks, mouthed against the bars, begging for a cigarette. The turnkey swung back a door and gave Joe Barry a gentle push. The prisoner's muscles galvanized.

"You're not going to put me in there!" he begged. "I didn't do anything; I swear I didn't do anything!"

"I'm just the turnkey; I don't even know what you're in for."

"But, please—"

"Now don't get hard about it!" His grip tightened with sudden strength, weakening the momentary resistance.

"Can't I talk to somebody? You could do that for me—"

"Park on that bunk in there," answered the turnkey. "You'll get a chance to do all the talking you want, in a little while."

Then his big key turned the lock and he was gone. There was only the metallic sound of men thumping about their prison, the tuneless singing of the drunken sailor in the cell adjacent.

SOMEHOW, like blurred clouds before the dawn, the minutes dragged by. Then the turnkey came, as disinterestedly as before, and unlocked the cell.

"Captain wants to see you."

This time it was into a room that they took him, where a big man with much gold on his uniform rolled in a loose-pivoted chair, his back against the apron of a roll-top desk, a big hand extended lazily upon a long table.

Pete Maxwell was there too, and Ed and Jerry and Jake. Three packages, wrapped in brown paper, were on the table, and an envelope from which currency protruded. The captain brushed that aside, and with thick fingers broke the strings of the larger packages.

From behind Joe Barry's eyes a sudden pressure began to make itself felt, as if thumbs were pushing them outward. The rattling paper had revealed two "heaters," or automatic pistols, and the ugly outlines of a "Tommy," or Thompson machine gun.

"Well, Sport," said the captain monotonously, "what about this hardware?"

"I don't know anything about it." Suddenly Joe Barry realized that he had become as repressed as they; his lips, blue and thin now, scarcely seemed to move. "I never saw the stuff before. It was put in my room to-day while I was away."

"So?" The captain looked up. "Away where?"

Joe Barry's lower jaw shot open, and hung there. If he told that, he also must tell whom he saw and where he went. Involuntarily he winced, as Sue Dayton might wince if she knew that the young fellow whom she had wanted for her ring partner was tainted by accusations.

"I went out of town for a day."

"It's a big country. Where?"

Joe Barry's eyes took on a desperate fire.

"I won't tell you!"

The captain looked at him blandly. "Oh, all right," he said. "Sit down."

They moved a chair to the end of the table; Ed and Jerry sat down, too, then Jake. Pete Maxwell merely strolled around the room, puffing a cigarette and looking at pictures he had seen a hundred times before. The captain picked up the evil-looking machine gun and eyed it carefully.

"So somebody sneaked this into your room. Who, for instance?"

Barry straightened with hope.

"His name is Martin. He's a lawyer. I got fired last night down at Louie Bertolini's place and this lawyer said he had a job for me. He gave me some money and told me to go out into the country and take a day off. Then I could come back to-night and tell him whether I wanted to go through with this deal or not. He said he had a friend who'd gotten into some trouble over liquor and he wanted me to take his place. So I—"

"Don't make a speech about it," said the captain quietly, easing him into silence. "We'll get at things one at a time. Martin, you said the name was?"

"Yes, sir."

"The town's full of Martins. Which one?"

Joe rubbed a hand across his eyes. The rest of it rolled tauntingly along the edge of his memory, refusing to be caught.

"Well?" Pete had come beside him and was standing there. Joe Barry sank back in his chair, dulled with relief.

"His name is John B. Martin," came tonelessly "He's an attorney and his offices are down at 60 Wall Street."

"Sure of that, are you?" The name evidently had made no impression upon the captain. He raised his eyes and gave a slight jerk of his head. "Take him back," he commanded.

Barry clung to the table.

"But there's a lot more to tell!" he begged. "I haven't got anything to hide. I want to tell you just how I happened to get into this mess."

"Don't tear your shirt," admonished the captain quietly. Then to Pete: "Take him back. By the way, tell the sergeant to keep him under cover from the newspaper gang. I'm getting tired of reading these yarns about innocent guys being framed. Funny, isn't it, how they're all innocent?"

AGAIN the metallic clatter of Joe's heels; again the faces and bars, and the sight of a frowzy woman peering out from under her hair.

Then he was alone, sitting on his slatted iron cot, hands sweating one moment between his knees, the next instant rubbing at his hot cheeks or across his burning eyes. He rose and paced, three steps one way, three steps back, bumping against the steel plates at one end, the rough bars at the other. In the next cell, the tattooed sailor began to sing again. Joe went to the grating.

"Listen!" he begged. "How long do they keep a fellow in a place like this before they give him a chance to get out? I haven't done anything—"

"Oh, pipe down on that scuttlebutt!" came from the next cell. The sailor shuffled away. A bunk grated with his weight. Soon he was snoring.

Joe began to pace again, three steps and three steps. Suddenly he settled, with fearful determination.

They hadn't believed him when he told about Mr. Martin. They'd just sent him back here without a chance! Maybe they'd question him again. That's it, they'd bring him out and question him for a while, then send him back to forget what he'd said.

But he must not forget one thing; they could burn him in oil if they wanted to, but he mustn't forget one thing. He'd make up a story about where he'd been to-day, and he'd stick to it. Other things faded—just that a girl should

not know; this seemed to be all that counted now. Minutes dragged by. He mustn't forget to keep quiet about where he'd been to-day. An hour passed. The turnkey came and unlocked his cell. They went back to the captain's office.

"Sit down," said the captain. Then everybody seemed to forget him, except a fifth person who was in the room now, a tall, gray-haired man of some distinguishing characteristics, who came to the other end of the table and looked intently at him.

"No," he said after a long time.

"Sure?" asked the captain.

"Absolutely."

Pete Maxwell lit another cigarette and looked at the pictures anew. Ed slumped in his chair and began the reading of an early edition newspaper. Jake and Jerry just sat. The captain looked over some papers from his desk. From the other end of the table, the gray-haired man stared at Joe—and Joe returned the look.

"Absolutely," said the gray-haired man for a second time.

The captain seemingly ignored the remark.

"Sport," he began, leaning toward Joe Barry, "forgot to ask you before. Suppose you give me an accurate description of this John B. Martin?"

Joe Barry licked his lips.

"Well, I don't know how accurate I can be. I didn't pay much attention, except that he was about medium height, and had dark hair and eyes."

"Weight?"

"He wasn't very heavy."

"And just medium height?"

"Yes, sir."

"Not tall, like Detective Maxwell there, or this gentleman?"

"No, sir."

The captain leaned back in his chair.

"Sport," he said, "suppose you cut the comedy and save us a lot of trouble. This gentleman here, whom we had to disturb out of a night's sleep, happens to have his office at 60 Wall Street. And he's the only John B. Martin in that building."

CHAPTER VI.

QUESTIONED.

JOE BARRY'S lips quivered; he was reaching the point where a nerve-burned body refused to give more emphatic signals of his distress.

"Well," came tonelessly, "I don't know what we can do about it."

The captain seemed to disregard that, too.

"That 'll be all, Mr. Martin. Sorry to have disturbed you. You're still absolutely sure you've never seen the lad before?"

"Absolutely," came the reply.

The distinguished man departed. Pete Maxwell pulled up a chair.

"Now, listen, Sport, there isn't any sense in your trying to beat this rap with a lot of clown stuff. You've got too much to explain. All that money in your pockets; that water-soaked suit, and those shoes with mud on them."

Joe's tongue licked quickly at dry lips.

"I don't know anything about the money. But about those clothes. I had them on day before yesterday and got caught in the rain."

"Where?"

"Up by Newburgh, near a little town called Orrs Mills."

Pete Maxwell glanced hastily toward the captain. The three other detectives shuffled into an attitude of attention, their arms on the table.

"Go right ahead," said Pete, then

interrupted at almost the first sentence. "What did you go up there for?"

Joe Barry shifted; the first bubbles of a slow hate were beginning to rise.

"I'm trying to tell—but you won't listen!"

"We haven't missed a trick—hop to it."

Joe Barry began his recital again, only to meet with more interruptions, cross-statements between the various men, returns to the beginning of his story. But at last they let him finish. Then Pete straightened and stretched, pressing his hands wide at the sides of his chest.

"Bridge player, eh, Sport?" he asked.

"No."

"You believe in leading trumps in a pinch, though. Now we'll play a few. Mind pushing the button, Captain?"

The captain complied and gave a command to the officer who responded to the signal. Out he went, to reënter almost immediately with four other persons. One of these Joe knew immediately, two more he felt he recognized, and a fourth he never had seen before, a stocky man, with the edge of his shield showing beneath his coat.

Joe was ordered to his feet. They all looked at him carefully. Then, bewildered, he heard himself identified, first by a farmer who swore him to be a man who had come to his door at midnight, seeking a place to sleep, then by the two others, gawking apple-knockers, who proclaimed him the person whom they had pursued on his exit from a haystack.

Cloudiness again assaulted Joe's mind. He had told all this, as a means to his own release. Then, by police-necromancy, his witnesses had appeared, not to help him, but to damn him.

"He's the one!" they said, and the farmer at whose door he had knocked proclaimed that he would know him out of a million. Joe's dark tired eyes stared stupidly from one to the other.

Deep within his brain something began to caution him to tighten his tongue, to say nothing more, lest every word he uttered should be used for his own condemnation. Then the three were led out again, only the stocky man remaining.

"HOW about him, sheriff?" asked the captain.

"I guess he'll do. The boys at the filling station in Newburgh weren't any too particular, of course. But from the general description of the two that were on the truck, this one seems to match up with the fellow who got away. Dark hair, medium-sized—"

"Lots of people are dark and medium-sized." Joe half rose with his final burst of desperate appeal. "Besides, I wasn't on any truck. If you'd let me tell my story—"

"We'd be delighted if you would, Sport," said the captain caustically. "But you seem to think you're dealing with a bunch of children. Anything more to-night, Pete?"

"Not unless you say so, Boss, it's pretty late. I'd like to get home to the storm and strife; she'll be squawking her head off. I'd just started to take her to a theater when this squeal came in."

Again Joe Barry was led back to his cell, pondering dully. Hate was in his heart; he had been duped, tricked, his honest story twisted into a confession of a crime, the true extent of which he did not know.

But his hatred, strangely enough, was clarified sufficiently to exempt these men who turned this night to one

of terror. They were merely instruments; Joe all but forgot them in the searing memory of the personality who had engineered this: Martin!

He knew no other name for him. Alone in his cell, bent on the slatted bunk, black hair stringing over his sweat-caked fingers as he bent his head to his hands, Joe Barry strove to tear the tangled events of the last two days apart and weld them anew into something that would possess perspective.

One by one, he went over his actions, while the drunken sailor snored, and far at the other end of the detention ward a snow-bird, too long off his deadly sustenance, s c r e a m e d and fought the imaginary worms which scored his flesh.

Joe Barry just sat there, eyes becoming steadily more dulled, while the grist of his tortured brain ground on.

Something had happened near Orrs Mills, which had to do with that overturned truck, something with which this man Martin had been connected.

Now Joe remembered the careful questioning which had been carried on in Martin's limousine under the guise of mere casual interest; the extraction of incidents—where Joe had been, whom he had seen, what he had done, what he knew about that wrecked truck; in fact, his every action from the time he had left New York until he had returned.

Out of that, Barry saw now, a man had gained the knowledge that here was some one who had been near the scene of a crime, and whose every action, instead of proving an alibi for him, would aid to conviction. Martin must have wanted such a person—to take the place of a guilty man. So he had engineered an acceptance of a proposition to go to prison, to conduct his actions so as to cause suspicion.

But Joe knew now that these suspicions were not merely the ones which Martin had designated. That machine gun, those two automatics, and that money which Pete Maxwell had extracted from the pocket of his old clothing were evidence enough of serious things impending.

Joe shuddered from the possible charge which rose constantly before him. Once, when the turnkey entered with an early morning prisoner, he strove to gain from him something of the nature of the accusations against him. It was useless. The hours passed. Then the turnkey came in again. This time it was to take him to the patrol that was to conduct him, with other prisoners, to police headquarters for the morning "line-up."

NOW that he was on the move again, a strange comparison forced itself into his brain—that of older days, when he had helped his father with the shipping of their few cattle to market. The constant shifting, the moving about, the shunting into one pen for a time and then another, and after that, the movement again.

When the patrol stopped at last before the big, gracefully barred building on Centre Street, Joe, hardly noticed his surroundings. Another place of confinement, another stopping-point in this shifting journey to a market-place of human frailties.

The atmosphere of business increased as he entered the building, with the other scuffling occupants of the patrol. A man in uniform sat in a sort of enclosed throne in the big rotunda; it might have been an office building information desk. Then came an office with the methodical taking of names.

After that, a hallway, flanked by doors with the names of interminable

bureaus upon them; after that, the line dived into a narrow stairway, under guard. Then they took his name again, in a little cage, where another fat man fondled various keys from a rack which hung above his desk.

Once more, he was in a cell, noticing vaguely that he possessed a mate, and staring as vaguely about him. This was more of a cage than ever; half-inch steel grating ran across the top of it inside the bars.

"As if a person could break those bars," he mumbled.

"'Tain't that," growled his cellmate. "It's to keep guys who are afraid to face the racket from slipping a belt or a piece o' cloth over 'em an' hangin' 'emselves."

Joe Barry did not look upward again. Cattle were not the only things, it seemed, that were watched to keep from injury in transit.

More hours went by. Then the turnkey came and got him; Pete Maxwell was waiting in the grilled cage outside the hold-over proper, to take him to the photographer's.

The endless detail, the constant shifting, moving about, from cage to cage, handcuff to handcuff. On the way up the narrow stairs, Joe Barry asked a nervous question. Maxwell shrugged his shoulders.

"You haven't been charged with anything yet," he said. Then he opened a door and put Joe Barry into still another cage, a big one this time, with some twenty other men, a cage which reached nearly to the ceiling, and opening upon a wide room, fitted mostly with tables and photographic apparatus. Pete Maxwell remained outside, apparently loafing. But Joe Barry noticed that his eyes were watchful, and he wondered why.

Inside the cage some men sat, some paced up and down, up and down, hands behind them, faces to the floor. At first there were only a few, then others came from the benches, and still more; pacing, turning swiftly, and moving back again.

The steps were sharp and metallic; another man on a bench began to fret. He looked about him warily. He licked his lips. Then he too began to pace.

Joe watched them with wonderment—but he did not join them. Again he caught the eyes of Pete Maxwell centered on him for an instant. Then the detective moved across the room to chat with others of his kind, each now with the shield pinned outside his coat. A sign told why—that detectives and suspects might not be confused in photographs.

There came a clicking sound; blue lights running in long tubes burst into a glare, changing the complexions of those who entered their range to a mottled, jaundiced hue.

PETE MAXWELL came to the gate and motioned. Joe Barry went dazedly forth. Some one caught his right hand and pressed it to a steel plate of cold, gummy ink, thence to paper. They took the print of his hand, then of his thumbs and fingers.

Pete lit a cigarette.

"Don't think he's got a record," he said. "Didn't join the parade."

The finger-print expert laughed.

"Put a vic in a bull-pen and he'll pace every time," he said. Then he called to a man under the long, blue lights.

"Joe Barry, coming up."

Again a record—always that record, always a book, thirsting for information. Joe faced the blue lights. A camera clicked. They turned him to a side position and again the shutter worked.

They moved him over to another portion of the room, under more blue lights, and stood him slouched, against a measuring post. Once more a camera took its record.

Then he went back to his cell again; another impartial, disinterested move had been taken in the disposition of something that once had been a human being. There was little time for rest. Soon Pete Maxwell was waiting in the grilled cage again.

"Line-up time," said the fat man as he unlocked the cell.

Again on the move, Pete silent beside him. Again the stairway and offices and at last the elevator. Again a cage, where men waited and sweated and rubbed their lips. Then a guard called the name of Joe Barry, and he moved forth to a big, pleasant room, bright with the daylight of unbarred windows. This was the top floor; here a leap for life would be a leap to death.

Sunshine gleamed into the big room; this place at other times was the police gymnasium. Now it filled a different purpose; detectives milled about in a roped inclosure before a movable rostrum, and a movable stage with a back wall from which extended a battery of dazzling lights.

Joe walked on, conscious of the penetration of scores of eyes. Then he was shunted up the three little brass-bound steps leading to the stage. Merciless lights gleamed down upon him at short range, other and greater lights blazed from above; out there the milling figures blurred; he saw faces and forms distantly as through yellow smoke. A man stood on the rostrum before him, with a sheaf of typewritten papers.

"Eight squad, 274," he read. "Joe Barry, 24, Sixteenth Street and Third Avenue, United States, restaurant entertainer. Arrested by Detectives Chuven and Maxwell, Lane and Grossett. No criminal record. Complainant, People of the State of New York. Charged with violation of the Sullivan law and—"

Joe Barry reeled, his dull eyes turning glazedly to the merciless blaze of the lights above. His dripping hands pressed at the smooth surface of the wall behind him and smeared it in his effort to support himself. For the impersonal voice of the inspector had continued:

"Wanted at Orrs Mills for double homicide."

After that, his clicking teeth and the fact that he could obey commands were the only evidences that Joe gave of mental direction. His head shook uncertainly as though the muscles refused longer to support it; his arms hung limp; his steps were the staggering ones of a drunken man.

He was told to walk, and he did, to and fro, continuing after the inspector had given the command to halt. He was turned about, straightened, slouched, standing with head lowered and head raised. He was made to talk, answering questions about his work and his whereabouts.

And all the time, a sharp word, carrying with it the acrid odor of powder smoke, danced and tumbled over the furrows of his fevered brain; homicide—homicide—homicide!

OUT of the room and down the elevator he went. Homicide. Into the cage and back to his cell and his loquacious jailmate, who asked a question. Joe Barry answered it with lips that did not move:

"Homicide."

They came for him again, and led

him out once more, past more offices, past more places where typewriters clicked and coatless men in black sleeve-protectors came and went; Joe saw it all and saw nothing. Then they were all in a room again, about a table, and Pete Maxwell was questioning him anew.

But Joe could only stare and say: "I can't tell you. I don't know."

Gradually, through the medium of examination, he learned the details of the accusation. During the wind and rain of that storm a truck laden with Canadian contraband had slithered along a greasy road, while cutting across country to intercept it had been two members of the State police, one bearing in a pocket a roll of currency marked that night for use in a later case.

There had been shots; one had punctured a rear tire; the truck had overturned, and the driver had died. Then the insistent spurts of yellow-red had come from the vicious muzzle of a Thompson machine gun in the hands of the second rider; one trooper had dropped before the vicious spit of the "Tomcat"; then the other had crumpled and gone face downward in the mud.

But when aid arrived, the pockets of the State troopers had been turned inside out, every mark of identification had been taken from the body of the dead driver, his hands crushed to defeat comparison of finger-prints, and his features mutilated beyond chance of recognition.

The "chopper," or machine gunner, had disappeared. Joe was accused of being that man. But he could only gasp and say:

"I don't know anything about it! I don't know! I don't know!"

They came at him from three sides, the sheriff, Detective Chuven, and Maxwell. They asked swift questions, they asked slow ones, they pressed him, they gave him long pauses. Insistently, quietly, never threatening, never deviating from the attitude that this was a part of a day's business and nothing else, they continued inexorably, but the sodden man before them could only move his dull, glazed eyes from one blurred face to another and answer:

"I don't know."

They went back to the beginning. They asked him about this man Martin. They wanted his real name. They wanted to know how long they had known each other. They asked him about his friends, and made queries regarding gangsters of whom Joe had never heard. They asked why he ever framed up such a story as that. Joe Barry rubbed at his throat.

"I didn't frame it up! I've told you the truth. You won't believe me! I tell you, he was a man who came into the restaurant; that's all I know. Louie Bertolini can tell you that, or Full-House, the waiter."

"Yeh?" asked Pete Maxwell. "Maybe you'd like to see them. We've got them waiting outside."

It amazed him, this ability to reach out into the city and obtain any one desired. Full-House and Louie were brought in, regarding the prisoner with a detached atmosphere of curiosity, as though they were seeing him for the first time. Louie spread his short arms.

"How should I know?" he queried in answer to Maxwell's question. "I work in my office all night; I only come out to fire this loafer. Should I be looking around the place to identify everybody who is there?"

That strange, slow hate began to

boil in Joe Barry anew, giving strength to the weakened beating of his heart. Then it was the turn of Full-House:

"Sure, I saw a fellow sitting over in the corner. A short man. He wore glasses; kind of a light, sandy-haired man and bald."

"You're a liar!" Joe Barry screamed it.

Detective Chuven shoved him back into his chair. Full-House shrugged his shoulders.

"How'd I know what you wanted him to look like?" he asked. "Maybe we were looking at different people. That's the one I saw."

THE haze closed in again; pierced by new questions as soon as Full-House and Louie were gone. Questions about that machine gun, where he had bought the revolvers. A faint hope rose in Joe Barry's brain.

"You ought to know those things aren't mine," he begged. "You've finger-printed me enough—why don't you try to find some of the same marks on those guns?"

"We would have if you'd left off your gloves," said Chuven quietly. "Careful not to leave a print anywhere, weren't you?"

"Don't tell everything you know," said Maxwell.

Then Pete hunched his chair closer to the table. He began at the beginning and asked his every question over again, only to receive the same old, dull answers. Then he came to one which he evidently had been saving.

"Now, Sport, you seemed a little touchy last night about one particular matter. Suppose we take it up again? Where were you all day yesterday?"

Joe sagged into his chair. He allowed his tired, sanded eyelids to close, and for once the grisly things which he had faced all this horrible night and day dissipated.

He saw the circus lot, the squat forms of the mud-colored tents, the banners flying in the afternoon breeze from the mastheads atop the poles. He looked upon the flashing little pictures which had set themselves upon his memory, a whistling boy, leading the Shetland ponies to water, the crowd around the ballyhoo stand, the sleeping roustabouts, sprawled in the shade of the wagons.

Then there was a glittering thing in his grasp, calling to him to play it, awakening that love of music which the rattle and blatter of a city had driven down, to all but nothingness.

There was a girl, fair-haired and trim, with slender strength, a girl with innate trust in the deepness of her blue eyes, the tantalizing hint of warm response upon her lips, the yellow sun creeping through the vagrant strands of her soft, brown hair, and creating there a golden radiance more precious than all the money in the world.

She was his girl, whether he ever saw her again or not, his girl to love in memory and in sacred dreams, his girl of one great day of happiness. One thing, at least, could remain with him behind bars, fragrant and beautiful.

Joe Barry opened his eyes and centered them. His lips became crooked and ugly.

"Go to hell!" he said. "All of you!"

CHAPTER VII.

HEADED FOR THE CHAIR.

JOE'S defiance had anything but a deterrent effect upon his questioners. Here was something which he desired to conceal; therefore it was the thing they desired most to know. But

at the end of an hour Pete Maxwell spread his hands against his chest, straightened, and strode away from the table.

"Suppose you let the old Bottle and Stopper have this bird alone for a while," he said. "It's pretty near time for arraignment."

At last they were alone. Pete picked up his chair and brought it to the side of his prisoner.

"Look here, kid," he said, "let's get together."

It was the first time he had used that term. Joe looked up, with something of wonderment. There seemed to be more of a personal touch to the detective's tone. But suddenly Joe hardened.

"Now you think that maybe you can get it out of me by treating me decently."

"We haven't given you any roughhouse, have we, kid?"

"No," he said grudgingly.

"You've been treated in a straight, businesslike manner by men who are in the business of finding out who committed crimes, and who haven't got the slightest interest in anything else. That's our job. We're given a set of jig-saws that 'll work into something if we can piece them together. It's what we're paid for, to keep picking up pieces, and hunting for little angles and curlemecues until we've got the puzzle beat enough to decide that twelve men ought to hear more about it. Most of the time," he said quietly, "when it's a kid like you, we hope we can't work it out."

Joe looked up. His hands half raised.

"Then why don't you give me a chance?" he begged. "I've told you I didn't even know what all this was about until you dragged me in here!"

"You don't expect us to believe that you didn't even see anything about it in the newspapers?"

"I hadn't read the papers. I hurried to work as soon as I got in town. The next morning—I didn't see any papers the next day either."

"You haven't explained yet where you were that next day."

"What chance did I have when I explained other things?"

"Just a minute there." Continuous accusation had done its work in another direction now. "I've heard enough of that. You came in to us with a ridiculous story about a man named Martin. Did we or did we not give you a chance to prove its truth?"

"You gave me a chance," said Joe huskily.

"You told us about being near Orrs Mills on a vacation. That isn't a new gag; it's been worked before by people who know they're licked on an identification; to try to switch it into an alibi. But we brought in the people, didn't we? Your showing up there an hour after the murder might have been all right, but it doesn't sound well when it matches up with three guns found in your room and the money off a dead man."

"Martin put them there, just like he called you up so you'd know just when to arrest me."

PETE MAXWELL reached into a pocket, and brought forth a letter.

"Read it," he said. It was in feminine writing, upon hotel paper:

> I am an Albany woman, in New York for a few days. Naturally, I do not care to give my name, since it is really not necessary, and because this may concern something attracting widespread publicity. I have been

reading in the papers about a murder which occurred after the overturning of a rum-runner's car.

While dining last night in Louie Bertolini's restaurant in Greenwich Village I heard a young man quarreling with the proprietor over being absent from work. It seemed he had been in the vicinity of this affair, and on thinking it over, I felt perhaps you might care to question him with the idea of gaining a clew to the murderers.

"So you see," said Pete as he retrieved the missive. "Nobody turned you in at all. You did it yourself. We merely went to the restaurant, found out this letter was true and went up after you. You weren't there; so we waited outside until we saw you come in. Now please don't tell me there weren't any women in that restaurant."

Joe stared dully.

"I don't know," he said. "I thought they'd gone. I guess they were there."

There was hopelessness about the admission. Pete asked a sudden question.

"Got a lawyer, kid?"

"No, sir."

"Better get one—as soon as they take you to Newburgh. This thing means the chair, you know."

"Yes, sir," said Joe vacantly. Pete looked at his watch.

"Look here," came bluntly, "you're only hurting yourself with this story. I'm not trying to bull you—you're no old-timer, I know that. You haven't got any record. Maybe, if you could show me that you'd been pulled in on this thing, and could tell me the names of the rest of the gang so I could get the real heads of it, maybe I could help you to a lighter sentence. You're not up against any easy rap, and you're going up against a clown jury, up-State. That's where you'll be tried, you know; we've only been assisting the sheriff down here. They give a fellow the chair a lot easier than we do. But it's up to you."

Joe Barry rubbed his eyes.

"Please—" he begged, "—please won't you just leave me alone?" His jaw began to jerk, spasmodically. "Keep a fellow up all night, asking him this and that, never giving him any chance to rest, twist everything he says into a lie— Oh, leave me alone."

His wild fists pounded the table now, until at last little lines of blood broke from the creases. "Leave me alone, you and your death house. You and your promises. You and your lies—leave me alone, leave me alone!"

Gradually he quieted, merely swaying drunkenly. Pete Maxwell rose and walked around him, slowly, cautiously, a puzzled light in his blue eyes. Then he merely stood, hands in his hip pockets, looking downward.

After a long time he pulled forth his watch again, returned it to his pocket, and then, not unkindly, caught at the prisoner's shoulder.

"All right, kid," he said. "We'd better be moving, I guess."

THIS time it was another journey by patrol car up Centre Street to a dual building, connected by bridges across the street. Inside one of them Joe was taken and to another cage, on the first floor, whence he could look out upon the monotonous activities of a court room. In another room, Pete stood at a desk, talking to a clerk.

At last Joe was led forward. He heard a question, from above him on the desk—the words were legal and indistinguishable. Then he heard the voice of Pete Maxwell.

"He pleads not guilty. And if your honor please, it may be necessary to rearraign him on a short affidavit at the expiration of forty-eight hours, on account of the indictment up-State and some delay on the warrant."

The man above him had something to say in reply; legalities which Joe did not understand.

Then, tired and numbed, Joe felt the handcuffs again, and knew that he was walking, out of the room and up a long stairway, like the stairway of a castle he had seen once in a motion picture, and after that, into a cage which seemed interminable.

On and on they went through this long grill-way while free people moved about in the great rotunda below; onward, to a turn, and still onward, like animals in the chutes of a stockyards, to a door leading to a bridge, across it to another door, to another office and a thirsting book, to another man with heavy keys.

They were in the Tombs. There Pete laid a hand on the prisoner's shoulder.

"I'm getting old, I guess," he said with a half laugh to the guard. Then to Joe: "So long, kid."

More bars and more grills. Great doors which swung heavily and silently outward, but which clanged eerily upon their closing. The half-faces of many men, chopped out of recognition by intervening bars. Upward, around endless cells standing in towering squares before corridors which faced the serrated light of iron-bound windows. Then the key clattered and a door opened.

"In there," said the guard, and added to some one inside: "Here's a gangster pal for you. Now you two rats can each take a corner and squeal at each other."

The door closed. Joe stood there while a trim-waisted youth, his clothing immaculate even here, his hair shining and sleek, his thin, venomous features immobile except for the jerk of a crooked smile, came sinuously from a bunk and peered without.

"I'd rather be a rat than a crummy louse," the prisoner said.

"You ought to know; you're both," the guard answered, and whistling softly, went onward. The prisoner turned back to his bunk.

"That lousy screw," he said without emphasis. "He'd jail his grandmother." Then as his thin, black brows raised: "What's the rap?"

Joe knew the term by now.

"Homicide." He still stood, half braced, upon the slick floor.

"Yeah? Who'd you shove over?"

Joe stared at his hands.

"They say I killed two State policemen up by Orrs Mills."

"Yeah?" His sleek companion lit a cigarette. "Yeah?" he asked again. "Where'd you go to school?"

"I?" Joe stared. "The last place was in Missouri."

"Yeah? Who was your teacher?"

"Miss Price; why?"

"Yeah?" asked the rat, and pulling in his under lip, blew his inhalation against his breast. "Why didn't she teach you how to address a gentleman?"

JOE BARRY glanced dazedly around him.

"I didn't know I was doing anything wrong," he said. "I've never been in a place like this before."

The gangster varied it this time.

"No?" he asked. Then suddenly: "Come here and sit down, Wet-ears." Once Joe was beside him, he whirled, talking in low, swift tones:

"What's the idea, stool?" he demanded. "You're not even smart enough to know how to answer my questions. But if you're after information, I'll give you some information. When they take you out, you tell 'em they ain't fooled nobody. Hymie Fradke's still got friends. Tell 'em I'm going to beat this rap if it takes my life. And if I do, somebody's going to get shoved over!"

Joe got up and walked away to his bunk. Fradke followed him.

"So I'm going to Dannemora, am I, on a four time jolt!" he jeered. "I'll be a good rat and not squeal and sit up there in Dannemora an' suck my thumb! Me on a Baumes Law fade-out, up in Dannemora and somebody else taking the gravy...Well, he's right," came grudgingly, "I won't squeal. But I'll beat Dannemora; after that, they can slip me the Hot Mamma as soon as they want to. Somebody else 'll be used to hell by the time I get there! Just tell him that!"

Joe Barry raised his arms, piteously. "Leave me alone, won't you?" he begged. "I don't know what you're talking about. I don't know who you are. I don't care who you are! Leave me alone!"

It struck the man's sense of pride. "Yeah?" he asked. "You're up for that chopper job on the Newburgh road and you don't know Hymie Fradke?"

Again Joe strove to leave him. Again Hymie Fradke, a little puzzled now, followed.

"How'd they ever fasten that rap on you, Wet-ears?" he asked at last.

Soon they were talking upon a different basis. It was surcease, a feeling of sympathy which urged Joe forward; Hymie's manner had changed greatly. Now he was settled beside Joe Barry, his thin, carefully manicured fingers tapping on his knees, or jerking his cigarette in a quick swing from his lips, returning it as swiftly. It was not long before he interrupted:

"Talk lower. Whisper—that's better. We didn't just happen to be put in here together. Ten to one, there's a stool in the next cell with an ear as big as a washtub."

The clatter of slum-time came, Hymie sneering at the bars. The night count was made and the lights dimmed. Then Hymie took his dulled companion back to the cot and pressed him down there.

"Yeah?" he asked in a whisper. "This guy Martin, describe him again. You're sure he wasn't big, with a pot stomach and glasses, thick glasses that made his eyes look big?"

He pulled at his chin. "Never heard him called Big Friday? No, it couldn't be him; he wouldn't do a thing like that in the open. Must 've worked through a fall guy." He shook his head. "I never heard of no Louie Bertolini, but that guy don't sound right either."

The thing seemed to fret him. He paced awhile and came back.

"'S damn funny to me," he said to Joe. "That's Big Friday's run up there, from Oswego through Schenectady, across to Albany and then down through Newburgh to the Bronx. Ain't I made it for him a dozen times? Yeah, and what do I get out of it? Double crossed. Know what I'm in for, kid?" he asked.

"No, I don't know."

"MY bondsman rears back on me," Fradke snarled. "Can you feature that? He says he don't know I'm a fourth offender, so he backfires on me and jerks my fall-

money out from under me. As if me 'nd him and Big Friday didn't sit and talk it all over when I get this tumble. As if we didn't all decide we was to put up the fall-money through him, and then forfeit it when I lam out of town. For why? Because he's afraid of his ten grand? Wasn't half of it my money? No, he wants to stow me away, up in Dannemora on a big-book hitch, so they can pair up with somebody else. Hell!"

He snapped his fingers. "This guy Martin—tell me just what he looked like."

It accomplished nothing. Another hour went by. The sounds of the street became fainter, giving greater volume to the night noises of the cell-block, the creaking of bunks as men tossed in their search of sleep, the snoring of the more hardened ones, the maddening sound of some one pacing, three steps and turn, three steps and turn.

Then a new sound came, like the beginning of an animal wail, far down the line. A metal cup began to beat against bars, slowly, the even beat of a brain reverting from civilized repression to savage rhythm. Louder, more racking the cry became, like the howl of a wolf upon a hill.

Bunks creaked, curses sounded; from the other side of the block came a rough voice urging the disturber to give 'er hell. Higher, higher, then a "screw" hurried in upon his soft soles, commanding silence. The great place was still again.

"Hell!" said Hymie Fradke. "Now we've got that. Why can't they keep them nuts some place else? Going up to Dannemora, probably. It gets a guy's goat to draw Dannemora. Set away off in the hills; no place to go to even if you make the wall. Ever know Coogie Haynes? He made the Dannemora wall. Three days later, he was back, ringing the bell and asking to get in. What the hell! It's better to get a jolt from the Stinging Lizzie than to draw Dannemora. . . . Oh, hell, there he goes again."

Once more, that unearthly crescendo had begun, mingled with the roaring of prisoners, who seemed to look upon it as a signal now. Then other cups began to bang, and some one beat against the bars with a shoe; groans sounded and yells, but above all there came that rising cry, higher, higher, to a shriek and even above a shriek. Gradually it stilled; the screws had come back and were in the cell down the line, arguing for placidity. Then Hymie was whispering again.

"WE got to put up with that! As if it ain't bad enough to know you're framed into Dannemora. They gave you a break!" he said grudgingly to Joe. "All you get is the chair; pull the switch and you're out. They ain't so good to me; afraid I'd squawk if I drew the Hot Mamma. But I got friends. I ain't in Dannemora yet.

"Maybe it's the best thing," he added nervously, "me drawing Dannemora. Just because Coogie couldn't make it, that ain't no sign nobody can make it. I got friends. That's something more Big Friday don't know; I got more friends in a day'n he ever saw. Wanted it all, didn't he? He'll get it, in a bronze box. Yeah, and I'll send a wreath and throw a sawbuck in the pay-off tub. I got friends.

"There's a first time to everything. Then we'll see about it, eh, kid? Any guy that 'll slough his partner! A guy that 'll slough anybody. Ain't he got it coming to him? Ain't he worth shoving across if you can get at him?

How about that baby that crucified you? I suppose you'll rush up and kiss him, if you ever beat this rap? Yeah! You'll do what I'll do to Big Friday. You'll set him over, that's what you'll do...Oh, damn it! There goes Nuts again!"

His voice faded now in the confusion from beyond. The shadows of twisting forms were on the walls; guards seemed to spring from nowhere and everywhere.

Wild, racking, the screams of a crazed man rose higher, higher, and then were muffled. There was the scuffling of forms, moving toward the door. Then came the clang of steel, some one screaming at a distance, then farther away, still farther. In the cell with Hymie Fradke, a man walked up and down, his lips bloodless, his eyes burning in fixation.

"Yes, that's right!" he agreed. "He's got it coming to him. He's made me a murderer; well, I'll be one, if I get a chance!"

"Cut that racket! Heads under!" A double guard was moving up and down the corridor now. The cell block stilled. Slowly Joe walked to his bunk, and sat there, a hand pounding against the steel with the same, slow tempo which had come from down the line. After awhile, Hymie moved across and caught his shoulders with wiry fingers.

"Wearing yourself out ain't no way to beat a rap," he commanded.

After a while, a dazed man slept.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

The Penalty

NIGHT was falling as tired, hungry, exhausted men fell back, still fighting hard to save the little town of Rossburg, Washington, which seemed to be doomed by the onrushing flames. Some three thousand acres of timber land had been destroyed by the raging fire; whole farms, grain fields and livestock had been devoured. Hundreds of men battled the most disastrous forest fire in the history of the upper Columbia River region of northeastern Washington.

At this juncture, an old and withered Indian approached one of the fire-fighting groups. Standing erect with head held high and arms folded, he requested to be shot. Little attention was paid to him until he became insistent. He pleaded to die. Then the reason for his strange conduct became known. He was Kootenai Pete, ancient brave of the Kootenai tribe, and lived a nomadic life beside his camp fire in the forests. One of his camp fires had started this disastrous conflagration. According to the customs of his tribe, such careless conduct was unbecoming a warrior. The punishment was death.

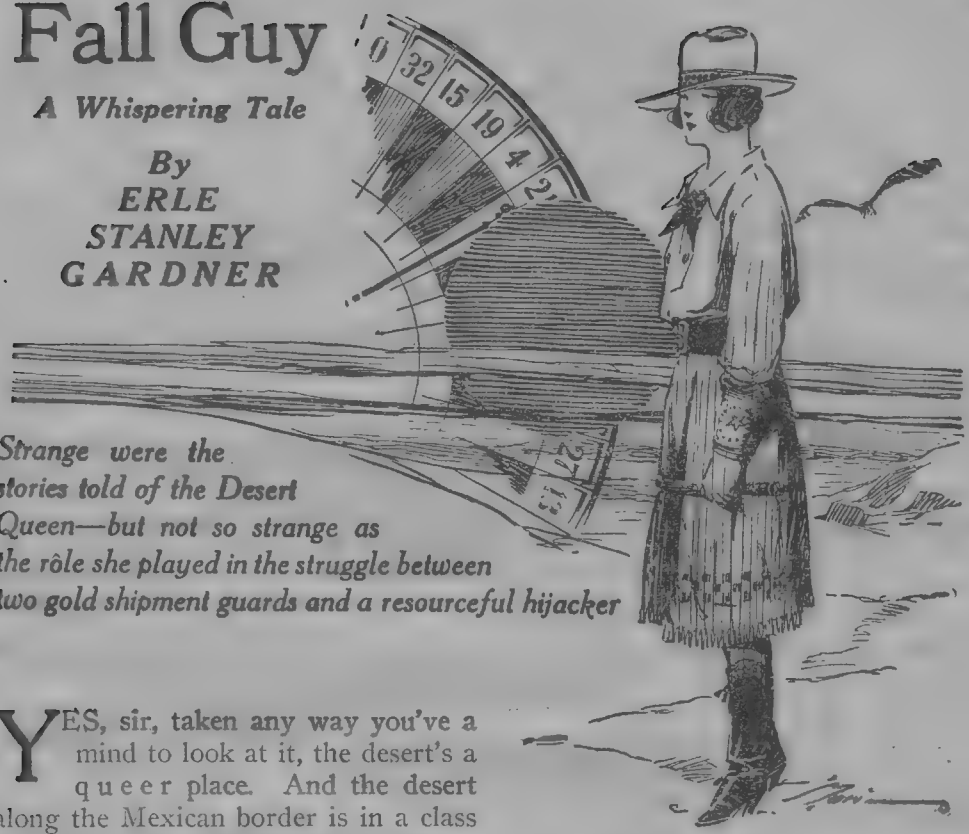
White men failed to recognize the red man's tribal law, and put him to work fighting the flames, instead of killing him. Since the redskin has lived a peaceful life in Stevens County longer than the oldest white settler can remember, it is doubtful if his punishment will be severe.

James William Fraser.

Fall Guy

A Whispering Tale

By
ERLE
STANLEY
GARDNER



Strange were the stories told of the Desert Queen—but not so strange as the rôle she played in the struggle between two gold shipment guards and a resourceful hijacker

YES, sir, taken any way you've a mind to look at it, the desert's a queer place. And the desert along the Mexican border is in a class by itself. Almost anything can happen down here. Not only can happen, but does. Most of it ain't believed, though.

Why, just the other day I was mentioning about the wheel ruts sticking up in the air, and some dude pitched in and says, "You mean the ruts are indented in the soil, my good man." Of course, I told him I wasn't his good man an' that I meant the ruts stuck *up* in the air, like I said.

Finally I'm hanged if I didn't have to take him out and show him.

There they were, wheel tracks sticking up eight inches above the surface of the desert, and where the horse had walked in between the wheels, there was mushrooms of earth sticking almost a foot up in the air.

The dude rubbed his eyes, and then sat right down on the desert and swore he'd never come west of the Rockies again. He said it was bad enough to have all the people crazy without having the country go crazy, too.

He was so flabbergasted I didn't tell him how it happened. Simple enough. You know the desert, you've probably seen 'em yourself. It happens in the Colorado Basin where the desert soil is mostly a fine silt. They make good 'dobe bricks out of that soil.

A light rain comes along once or twice a year. If somebody drives a wagon over the ground then, the wheels sink down into the soil and so do the horse's hoofs. But it packs that light silt into a regular 'dobe. Then

when the sun does its stuff and the wind blows the powdery silt around this way and that, the 'dobe stays put. After a year or so the tracks 'll be sticking right up in the air. I've seen 'em eighteen inches high with regular hills where the horse stepped.

That's the way with the desert. Strange things happen down there. If you know how they happen they don't seem so strange. If you just see 'em, and don't know how they happened, you naturally think the country's gone crazy.

TAKE the Desert Queen, for instance. Ever hear of her? No, I don't mean a mine of that name, I mean a regular woman, the Desert Queen—and she's a sure enough queen if there ever was one.

I'd heard whispers of her for a couple of years, but I'd never seen her. You know how the desert is, full of whispers. Why, even the sand whispers. You'll hear it of nights when you're laid out in your blankets, sand rustling against the cactus stalks and sounding like whispers. Then you'll hear the sand rustling against the sand, making regular sand whispers. Sometimes it seems as though you can hear what the sand's saying . . . just before you drop off to sleep, sort of.

But this here Desert Queen ain't got nothing to do with sand whispers. She's a real flesh and blood queen. But I thought for a long while she wasn't anything but a Sand Whisper.

I heard of her first down in Los Algodones. The roulette table was out four thousand. The proprietor said it was an olive-skinned girl with smoky eyes and a cowboy hat who played a system. I listened to him and grinned. Those gamblers are always inventing stories of people who made big killings. It acts as a come-on for the suckers—their customers.

But six months later I heard of her in Tia Juana. Four thousand again. She seemed to play a system and quit when she got four thousand.

Well, I was sitting right here in this very *cantina* one night, a year or so later, when I noticed a commotion over at the roulette table. See how this big horseshoe bar winds around? And there's the house-girls, asking you to dance and buy a drink, over on one side, and the roulette wheel on the other!

I was sitting right about here, and I saw something was happening over at the roulette table. So I got up and strolled over.

She was a slender kid with black hair and smoky eyes, and the eyes were the big part of her face. She was an American, all right, and a beauty. Her skin was a smooth olive, the lips were a dark red, and they weren't colored up any, either. She was a regular daughter of the desert, the kind that can stay out in the blistering sun and still have a smooth skin and velvet complexion.

She had a cowboy hat and riding boots, a buckskin skirt and a big belt around the waist. There wasn't any gun in the belt, but you could see where a holster was usually worn. The sun had tanned the rest of the belt a different color. The place where the holster was usually kept was darker.

She was playing a system all right. I don't know much about roulette systems. Most of 'em are the bunk. But they tell me that if you'll wait until a certain sequence of colors comes an' then slide out your bets, you've got a better than two to one chance.

This girl sure knew her system, and she could control her play. There's lots

of good mathematical systems at roulette. The trouble is most people ain't got the self control necessary to stand up an' play a system. They get to gambling on the side, and then they're finished.

Personally, I got my own system with roulette. I leave it alone. That keeps me from losing, and that's more than you can say about most systems.

But this girl was playing as cool and calm as though everybody in the room wasn't watching her. She'd watch the numbers fall for a few minutes, then make a bet. If she lost she'd double it the next time, and keep doubling. But she didn't lose. She seemed to know just about where that little ball was goin' to hop.

I WATCHED her for a while, and then went back and sat down.

Phil Ryan came over and sat down next to me.

"'Lo, Sid."

"'Lo, Phil. How's tricks?"

"So-so."

"Anything new?"

"I got a job for you, Sid."

That sounded good to me. Phil and I were buddies for quite a while, and I wanted a chance to get goin' with him again.

Phil's another one of those things you wouldn't believe. He's a Western gunman. Thought there weren't any more, didn't you? Just like those wheel tracks in the desert. You don't believe 'em until you have 'em explained.

Well, Phil's like that. He's what they call a guard. He learned to handle a gun in the Big Scrap. Me, I'm an old-timer, and I've packed a Colt over more desert than most people ever see. But Phil was a youngster, one of the new school.

Oh, the gunmen ain't killers any more. They're just fellows who can do some fancy shootin' when the occasion calls for it. There's lots of capital in the desert country now, and that capital has to keep moving in the form of cash. There's the out-of-the-way mines with the big payroll, and there's the tourist resorts on the border with their big stocks of cash, always coming and going.

The border's still a tough place, for all the tinsel and all the tourist-traps. And they employ us fellows to sort of chaperon the coin shipments. We don't have nothing much to do except to ride along. Mostly just being on hand is all the protection we need to give to a shipment.

No highwayman is likely to tackle a job where he knows there's a couple of men standing guard who can shoot with either hand and shoot fast.

I ain't so fast as I used to be. In the old days when Tombstone was still running I could go for iron with the best of them, even if I do say it. But I'm no spring chicken any more. But this here Phil Ryan's fast, awful fast. I've seen lots of fast fellows in the old days, and Phil's as fast as any of 'em. You could have put him back with the Earps and the Clantons, and he'd have made history—maybe would have made it a lot different from what it was.

Anyhow, I was glad to get a job that Phil had dug up. I knew it 'd be ridin' with him, and I always liked Phil.

"What's this here job?" I asked.

"Chaperonin' a bunch of gold bars up to the border from the Dry Canteen Mine."

"Why the reënforcements? You been holdin' down that job by yourself for quite some time."

"They got a tip. Pedro Gallivan's got an eye on the shipment."

I whistled a little bit.

Pedro was a border character just like all the rest that had gone before. He wasn't Mex and he wasn't American. Sort of a mixture, was Pedro, and he was too slick ever to get caught.

The border has done lots of things to civilization, and civilization has done lots of things to the border. Dope, booze, and Chinks get run across, and that business is all cash. Pedro specialized in finding out where the cash was. He was a hijacker of cash. He didn't monkey with petty running of hooch or dope or Chinks, but he sure did swoop down on the money.

He lived in a big *hacienda* with palm trees and servants, and he had a shell of respectability about the place that made him seem like a retired banker. But there were plenty of whispers around about Pedro Gallivan. He didn't ever pull much in person. He always had a "fall guy" to take the blame if anything went wrong, and he had plenty of people working for him.

It was whispered that he furnished some of the big imports for shipment. He had people with him who were polished, educated, and crooked. Pedro was the head of the system. God help a man, or woman, for that matter, that Pedro got into his clutches. He made 'em work for him and work hard until he needed a fall guy, and then—well, dead people don't tell tales in the border country any more than they do anywheres else.

"WHAT makes you think Pedro's going after the mine gold?" I wanted to know.

Phil glanced around him. His lips got tight. "A tip."

"He never has monkeyed with any of that sort of stuff. Always worked on the border runners."

"This is a straight tip."

We sat and looked at each other for a while.

"Count me in," I said.

He nodded, happened to glance toward the roulette and sat down his beer glass so hard the bottom bumped the table.

"What's doing?" he asked.

"A smoky-eyed jane with a system."

He was on his feet before I knew what he was going to do, and halfway over to the roulette table before I had a chance to say anything.

She looked up and saw him coming.

Her face changed color for an instant, then the smoky eyes bored straight into his and the lips came back from pearly teeth.

Phil swept off his sweat-stained sombrero, and the girl cashed in her chips. They went out together and the crowd gawked.

I stuck around until midnight. That was when we were scheduled to start out. Phil showed on the dot. The border was closed and all the tourists had gone home. The place was quiet.

"The broncs are out front," he said.

I followed him without saying anything.

My stirrups had to be lengthened, and I wanted to take a good look at the rifle that was in the saddle scabbard. I had my own guns, and I got 'em from the room where I was hanging out. We started about quarter past twelve.

The desert was silent, just crammed full of stars. The horses didn't make much noise, plumping their feet down into the soft sand. We rode in silence for over an hour.

"What are the plans?" I asked.

"We intercept the shipment about ten miles farther south, and we escort it to the road. There they've got armed automobiles waiting. If there's any trouble it 'll be on the trail."

I rode along for another half hour. We'd left the desert floor and were following a trail along the steep sides of the barren desert mountains that show soft and purple from the floor of the desert, but are very devils to ride over, being mostly straight up and down with all sorts of volcanic rock and what-not sticking out and playing thunder with a horse.

"Who was the girl?"

"Miss Dixie Carson."

"She the one they call the Desert Queen?"

"Yes. Ever met her?"

"No. Never saw her before. Heard of her. Sort of whispers, nothing much definite."

He didn't say anything for a quarter of a mile. Then he half turned in his saddle.

"I love her," he said.

"You should," I told him. "I'm for you."

He grunted and swung back into the saddle.

That was all there was to it. But he knew and I knew. Out there in the star-filled silence of a desert night a fellow doesn't need to talk much to get an idea across. Phil knew I wasn't going to babble anything, and that if he ever needed me to back his play I'd be there.

WE finished our short cut and came to the main trail from the mine half an hour before the burro train got there. It showed up about daylight with a clatter of little bells and the sound of shuffling feet and soft, Mexican voices.

Phil hailed the leader, and then we rode on ahead. A couple of *rurales* were in the rear.

The east got brassy and the stars became little needle points. I could look back and see the burro train, twisting like some big serpent as it wound its way around the side of the hills, following a pass through the mountains.

I loosened up my rifle, looked up at the ridges of the mountains.

"Good place for an ambush, Phil."

"Yeah. Let's ride on ahead a ways."

We touched the broncs with the spurs and went on ahead. After a while we couldn't hear the little bells any more.

The sun touched the purple peaks of the high mountains.

"Phil," I said, "my eyes ain't as good as they used to be any more, but take a look at that bush up on the slope about two hundred yards, just below that outcropping of red rock."

Phil swung his head up.

"Hm—" he began, and then it happened.

There was the cough of a high power rifle, and the bullet plunked into solid meat. I didn't have time to see whether it was Phil or the bronc. I had the spurs into my own cayuse, and we were off the trail and going hell-for-leather down the side of the mountain.

There was a dry wash at the bottom, and some bowlders in the bottom. I grabbed the gun as the horse scrambled into the bowlders, and kicked my feet free from the stirrups when I felt air between me and the saddle.

Bullets were chipping bits of rock off of the bowlders all around me. It was like a hailstorm on a lake. I could hear the pop of guns and the spatter of

bullets. One of the horses was screaming with pain or terror or both.

I was glad we'd come on ahead of the pack train. It would have been plain hell to have the burros trapped in that cañon, each with a load of gold bars. As it was, there wasn't anybody except Phil and myself, and Phil was able to take care of himself—or else it was all over with him.

I dropped back of a rock where there was plenty of shelter and cut loose at the bush up on the ridge. I couldn't see anybody, but I wanted to let Phil know I was all right and, besides, to warn the *rurales* back with the pack train.

Then I heard Phil's gun roar up above me, and knew we were sittin' pretty. Phil would be almost sure to try for the ridge, and he'd count on me to cover him from down in the cañon. My legs ain't much for runnin' up hill any more, but I can still see between the sights.

I knew Phil was out and running from the way the bullets quit spatterin' against my rock. I flung up over it. A man's head and shoulders were outlined against the sky above the ridge. He was sighting a gun up on the slope where Phil was jumping for a bush.

I cut loose and beat that guy to it.

He settled, slumped, rolled and lay still.

Somebody clipped a hole through my sombrero. But then, it was gettin' old, anyway. I slammed home a shell and took a snap shot at a bit of motion on top of the ridge. I didn't hit him, but I threw enough dust in his eyes to put him out of the fight for a while—and the fight wasn't goin' to last long.

Phil was out in the open now, walkin' toward the ridge, trustin' to me to see that nobody got up to take a shot. One fellow tried it. I think I hit him in the leg, from the way he went down.

Then there wasn't any more firing. I heard the drum of a horse's hoofs, and then the whinny of another horse. Phil broke into a run, and I saw him bring his gun to his shoulder as he took a couple of long distance shots.

That was all there was to it.

WE got the *rurales,* and the man who was dead was properly checked off. He was a guy we had seen a couple of times with Pedro Gallivan. But he didn't have anything that showed he'd ever belonged to Pedro, except a bullet hole in the back of his head. My bullet had gone through his shoulder and down into his innards. It 'd probably have been fatal. But he might have talked a little bit if it hadn't been for that bullet hole in the back of his head.

That was one of Pedro's little tricks. Dead men didn't talk, any.

The fellow I'd wounded in the leg had evidently made his bronc all right. There was only one horse left behind. It had been stolen from north of the border the night before.

Pedro was a clever cuss when it came to covering his tracks, and if somebody had to take a tumble, he always left a fall guy.

After that Phil and I got a new job. The mine owners hadn't paid much attention to Pedro as long as he only went after money paid for booze and Chinks. But when he started going after bars of gold, he was getting too close to home for the big lads to take any comfort, so they told Phil and me to take a couple of months, ride trail on Pedro, and wipe him out when we got a good excuse.

But Pedro knew when he'd bit off more than he could chew. He kept

pretty close to first base, and Phil and I just sort of stuck around where we could keep tabs on what was going on at his *hacienda.*

I think Pedro had us spotted. It wasn't that he said anything; but the Mex who tried to knife Phil one night, and the gent of undetermined nationality who took a shot at me from ambush one full moon, made it look as though somebody knew what we were there for.

But Pedro was respectably at home in the *hacienda* both times.

We rode up there to make sure. He welcomed us with oily eyes and suave comments. We answered him with polite remarks that didn't fool anybody. And that was the way things stood.

Then Walter Hedley showed up.

Hedley was just a bit of human wreckage, nothing more. He was the sort of backwater flotsam that collects at the border. They're always more or less the same. Drink is the big thing in their lives.

Hedley must have had some pretty good stock in him. He was a gentleman after he got drunk, and that's about the best indication of breeding you can get—along the border, anyway.

Pedro looked Hedley over and invited him up to the *hacienda.*

Phil and I knew what that meant. Pedro was in need of some more fall guys. He liked the fellows who had breeding and education. He shifted 'em from booze to dope, got them so they could put up a good front when they were hopped up, and sent 'em out on border business that wouldn't bear too much of a searchlight.

We didn't want fall guys. We wanted Pedro. So we discussed how maybe we could get this guy Hedley to talkin' with us before Pedro got him branded.

But it was the Desert Queen who dealt herself in on the hand. I don't know how she found out what it was all about, but she called herself in on the play, and from then on things moved fast.

THROUGH Phil, I'd found out more about this girl they called the Desert Queen, the one whose real name was Dixie Carson. She made a specialty of getting the human wreckage of the border, patching it up so it could sail once more, and starting it off on another voyage.

Mostly she dealt in the sort of women who are thrown into the border and left there. She had a secluded ranch way south and she built up the people she took in down there, gave 'em lots of fresh air, staked 'em with money, and gave 'em self-respect.

That was why she raided the roulette every once in a while. She was a genius on mathematics, had a college degree in it, and she'd figured out things about a roulette wheel. Phil said she called it The Calculus of Chance, or something like that.

Anyhow, the Queen got track of Walter Hedley, and he fell for her like a ton of brick. The Queen wanted Hedley to straighten him up. Pedro wanted Hedley to drag him down. It was a battle.

Pedro got Hedley to visit him at his *hacienda.* Dixie got Hedley one night, invited him to her place, and drove off with him the next morning. A week later Phil came to me.

"I'm quittin'," he said.

"Quittin' the job, Phil?"

"Yeah."

"What's the matter, son?"

"Goin' to work for the Queen."

I looked him over. He didn't ring true somehow.

"What's the big idea, she won a lot of gold she wants guarded?"

"Nope. She wants me to take Walt Hedley out into the desert an' make a man of him. Pedro got him started using dope while he was at the *hacienda*. She can cure him of booze, but he keeps getting out and smuggling in dope. She says he wants to kill himself when he realizes what he's done, but when the craving gets on him he can't resist."

I didn't say anything. I ain't never craved dope myself, and a man who hasn't had any particular craving ain't in any position to pass judgment on a guy that has it.

"When do you start?"

"To-night."

"The mine people sending in anybody to work with me?"

"No. They figure Pedro's lying low as long as somebody's watchin' him, and they figure one man can watch him just as well and twice as cheap as two men."

I grunted. Mine people get that way. Some smart bookkeeper out in New York was auditing the books and telling the superintendent in Mexico how to handle a slick bandit like Pedro Gallivan. But I let it go. It was bread and butter for me, and that's one thing I won't fight with.

"Where you goin'?" I asked.

"Out to the Phillips prospect. If you get out that way, drop in."

"You don't seem cheerful, son."

He looked down his nose.

"She loves him," he said.

There wasn't anything I could say, so I put one of my hands on his shoulder.

"Things have a way of workin' out all right, Phil, old-timer. Stay with it."

He grunted and walked away.

I saw them start that night. The dude was sittin' erect and straight, his jaw fairly oozin' resolution an' determination. That's the way with people who know they ain't goin' to last. They put on twice as much determination as the situation calls for, just to fool themselves.

Phil sat slumped in the saddle takin' it easy, the way a man does when he's in for a long fight and knows he's goin' to come through somewheres near the top or know why.

OUT where they were goin' it was too hot to ride in the daytime. They had to make it at night. They had a pack-horse, and there was a trickle of water at the place. It was an old abandoned prospect, baked by the sun, swept by the drifting sands. There was just sky, sun, cactus, and sand, nothing else, and it didn't vary from day to day.

I figured I'd ride out that way after a week or so. I didn't like the idea of those two men being cooped up in that loneliness, both of 'em in love with the same girl, one of 'em the successful one, and havin' a streak of yellow, the other all man, and tryin' to make a man outa the yellow one.

The desert does things to men. It's the utter silence, the emptiness, the loneliness of the place. A man either hates it or loves it the first time he gets into it. But even if he loves it, he can't stand too much of it.

Things began to happen out at the *hacienda,* however, that kept me busy. Pedro had riders comin' in at nights, and there were times when the house was all dark as though people had gone to bed, but there'd be the tinkle of glasses and the hum of voices far into the night.

I cached a roll of blankets within

hearing distance of the corral and got to sleeping out there under the stars.

Twice riders saddled up and left the place, and I couldn't follow them on account of the darkness. The third time there was a moon, and the fellow who rode away into the desert was a wiry little Mexican. I knew him. He'd been a gambler in Mexicali until Pedro enlisted him. He was a resourceful little cuss.

I followed for a couple of hours before I realized he was takin' a trail toward the Phillips prospect. Then I closed up the gap.

I was close to him when it happened. A shadow rose up out of the ground.

"Is it you, *amigo?*" asked the rider.

"It is not the one you expect, but the one who expects you," said the voice of Phil Ryan, speaking in Spanish. "You will leave what you bring here with me, and you will tell the one who sent you that there will be nothing more sent."

The rider sat very still and straight for a few seconds.

I got the picture then. Pedro had been sending in dope to Walter Hedley, and Phil was breaking up his little game.

"*Señor,*" said the rider, speaking too softly, too smoothly, "you ask for that which I have. Take it then!"

He was fast, that bird.

I ain't so speedy as I used to be in the old days, and my hand was still coming up from the holster, tugging at the hammer on my gun, when I saw the moonlight glisten on his leveled weapon.

But Phil Ryan's gun crashed and I saw the Mexican's right wrist wilt.

"Go back, and tell your master I want no more fall guys. Tell him to come in person the next time he has business with me," said Phil's voice.

Phil was fast on the draw, awfully fast.

I got back out of the way and let the rider pass. Then I rode in for a chat with Phil.

"She loves him," said Phil. "She's been out here twice. I can see how it is. She wants him to get well."

"And him?"

Phil shrugged his shoulders.

"Is he a yellow one at heart, underneath all that smooth bearing?" I asked.

"I can't tell," said Phil.

Which was a lie. When a man's spent that long in the desert with another chap, he can tell everything about him. But if Phil wanted to be generous about it, I wasn't going to interfere. I have a hunch that things come out right in the desert if you just give 'em time enough.

I rode away and left Phil with his dude.

I SAW Dixie Carson after that, and I took the risk of talking to her.

"If you want him, you're going about it the wrong way. He's from a good family. If he gets cured there'll be some society bud coming to claim him," I said.

It was none of my business, but I had to say it to hear with my own ears whether she really loved him. And I'd got to know her better since I'd been ridin' with Phil.

The olive skin didn't change color. The eyes still remained smoky, impassive.

"That," she said slowly, "is my own business."

I let it go at that because she was right.

Pedro was still lying low. Such riders as went from his place were going on border hijacking business. They

never once went toward the trails that came in from the mines.

I rather guessed Pedro's one experience with mine guards had sort of convinced him he'd better leave the outfits alone. But I just kept right on the job.

Then Phil showed up with the news his dude was cured.

He was, too. I saw Hedley when he rode in. The shoulders were back and the eyes were steady. He'd lost that look of too much determination that had gripped him when he went into the desert.

He had a long talk with Dixie Carson; and after that, he sent a telegram.

Then Phil told me a funny thing. It seemed there was a girl who came from a good family and who was engaged to this here dude. Now that Hedley had got full control of himself, he'd wired her, telling her the whole situation, offering to release her or to go through with it any way she wanted.

It was a couple of days before he got an answer.

He was around the border resorts, looking at the people swigging booze over the bar, looking at the gambling, sneering and keeping straight.

Personally I didn't like that sneer. If he'd been a real thoroughbred and had been cured, he wouldn't have been so sneery at the poor unfortunates who were hitting it up. That self-righteousness in a man who has been down in the gutter don't impress me. But I didn't say anything. I'd said too much already.

The second day the girl came, in person. She wanted to see Hedley before she answered one way or another.

To my eye she was a washout. She was one of those society blondes with a funny way of pronouncing her "a's."

Walter Hedley made quite a fuss over her. She held the reins and she showed it. With the Desert Queen she rubbed it in. Walter made the presentation with something of a flourish. A man always does take delight in presenting two women who love him, one to the other. He thinks they'd oughta get along well together! Seems like men would never learn.

"Miss Westing, may I present Miss Dixie Carson, the girl who helped me find myself."

The Desert Queen held out her hand cordially enough.

The blonde looked her over from head to foot.

"I thought, Walter, you'd abandoned all your old associates," she said. Then she walked away.

The Desert Queen's face got a darkish color, but her eyes remained steady.

"Good-by, Walter," she said, and turned.

The dude hesitated for ten or fifteen seconds, then went over to the blonde. I was glad Phil wasn't there to see that.

After that things moved fast at the border. First came the stock crash. You wouldn't think it'd affect the border, but it did, lots of ways. Mines shut down, for one thing. And the blonde did some telegraphing, for another. What her dad wired back evidently wasn't so reassuring. She slit the telegram open, read it, then stamped her foot.

"I do wish fawther wouldn't be so downright stupid," she said.

Half a dozen people heard her, and the news traveled.

That night she bucked the roulette wheel and won about three hundred. The next day she met Pedro Gallivan.

The next evening she and Walter were "visiting" at the Gallivan *hacienda*.

BY that time I'd developed a fat Mexican cook to give me the low-down on Pedro. She was working daytimes at the *hacienda*. She spent the nights with her family. It took lots of *dinero* to bribe her to cough up such information as she picked up, but she had a good memory.

She told me about the blonde and Walter.

The Westing girl, it seemed, was playing Pedro and Walter, one against the other. Walter didn't want to stay out there, and he was sore. The girl had a talk with him about lots of things, and they stayed.

I pumped the Mex to find out if Pedro was riding.

She didn't know. She only knew that Pedro was looking at the gringo girl with melting eyes and making protestations of affection.

I asked her where Walter had been.

She said Walter had been sent on an errand.

I thought over that being sent on an errand business. It didn't sound so good. I looked around for Phil. He wasn't in town. I lost ten dollars making fool bets on roulette and went to bed.

About two o'clock I heard shots and tumbled to the floor, reaching for my boots with one hand and my cartridge belt with the other.

There was the clatter of horses coming at a breakneck pace, and there was the tattoo of pistol shots, the rattle of rifle fire, and something dropped to the ground with a thud that jarred the pictures on my wall.

The *rurales* were there about the time I was.

The dead man was Walter Hedley.

The *rurales* told of a boldly planned holdup to clean out the cash that was held over in the casino. It was one of those wildly foolish affairs that seemed to be foredoomed to failure, but it had almost worked. A chance alarm had brought the *rurales*. Maybe that alarm hadn't been so much of a chance after all.

Walter Hedley was pretty well riddled with lead. There was a look of puzzled bewilderment on his face. The *rurales* must have been shooting exceptionally well that night. Or maybe they'd had a little help.

The posse swept on after the rest of the gang. They came back inside of half an hour. The Mexes had one dead bandit, and a fall guy is all they look for. The robbery hadn't been a success, the "ringleader" was dead, what more could one ask for?

They consumed much *tequila*, and assumed a great deal of credit for straight shooting.

Pedro had a perfect alibi. I investigated it.

The little Mex gambler that had been taking the dope into the Phillips prospect, the one Phil Ryan had shot in the wrist, didn't have any alibi. But you can't hang anything on a man just because he hasn't an alibi.

The blond girl wept vigorously over her "fallen hero." The Desert Queen took the news in silence. After that she sat for a long while, looking at the horizon with unmoist eyes.

TWO nights later my spy tipped me off that Pedro was riding, and she had heard some mention of bars of gold.

Another shipment was due from the Dry Canteen Mine, and I got in touch with Phil and asked him if he wanted to ride, just for old times' sake.

I didn't like the expression on his face when he said he did.

"Don't try to ride into no bullets, son, and get killed on the field of duty," I ventured to suggest.

He snorted. "Nobody'd care if I did."

"That's a coward's game," I said shortly.

"I ain't a coward."

"Don't think coward thoughts, then, and you won't get to be one."

I had to let it go at that.

We lay in wait where we could see the corral back of Pedro's *hacienda*. We moved in after dark, and there was a wind blowing, a wind that whipped the fine silt in little whirlwinds, sent them dancing off over the face of the desert.

About midnight we saw shadowy figures about the corral. Horses got saddled. Then we could hear riders.

"No fall guys this time," muttered Phil.

I grunted assent. We were between the riders and the *hacienda*, and we intended to keep between them.

It was tough work, trailing the party ahead, yet keeping out of sight and hearing. There was a moon, and the little band rode fast.

They took a short cut trail. I hadn't known of it before. Once I thought we had lost sight of them. The wind was bad up along the ridges, and there was a cloud scud forming over the moon.

But we caught up to them in a box cañon below, almost ran onto them before we knew it. They'd evidently stopped for a palaver. We trailed them easy from there until they staked out their broncs in a clump of trees just below a spring.

The men climbed up a ridge and settled themselves. It was getting gray dawn now, and Phil and I had to work pretty carefully to keep from being discovered.

There were six horses in the party. Two of 'em were pack horses with empty *alforjas*—empty saddle bags. The other four were prime saddle stock.

Below the ridge ran the automobile road.

"S'pose they're going to tackle the armed cars?"

Phil shrugged his shoulders.

We waited. It was all there was to do.

An automobile showed up. Behind it came another. The tops were down, men sat in the cars, and the men had rifles. The top of the ridge spouted fire.

One of the cars swerved drunkenly.

The driver of the other car ran it to a stop, turned and spoke to the men with him.

The crackle of rifles still sounded on the ridge.

We could see it all, then. Pedro had bought over some of the guards. They were throwing in with him. I glanced at Phil.

He nodded.

I took a fine sight at a huddled figure and cut loose. Phil's gun roared in my ear. That cross fire smoked 'em out. They tried to get us, but we were well covered, and we had lots of time. They were fighting against time.

The guards below came to life and began to do some shooting. Pedro's gang started for their broncs. So we made for ours.

I could hear the sweep of hoofs ahead of me and the sound of shooting. Phil was riding stirrup to stirrup with me and we were holding our fire until we could see something to shoot at.

The sun was just making thin purple lines of reddish color along the tops of the ridges. The wind was blowing and it was cold. We were between the riders and the *hacienda*.

"You double back and keep 'em from getting to the *hacienda*. I can haze 'em along the trail," yelled Phil.

I didn't like the idea, but he pointed out, "It's our best chance. We can't catch 'em, and they'll double around on a secret trail somewhere. They know the mountains."

Phil sounded right, so I swung back.

THEY did just what he'd predicted, took a cut-off trail, and swung back into the *hacienda* trail. I was there waiting for 'em. Phil was behind 'em.

They dropped behind bowlders and got real deadly.

They were fighting for their lives and knew it, this time. And the time element didn't bother 'em so much now. They were four against two.

We had 'em pocketed, and they had us boxed. It was a question of making every shot count and waiting for developments. I built a little fire behind a rock and sent up a smoke signal. The fight got warmer after that.

But the bandits couldn't get out. The wind did things to my smoke signal, but I figured there'd be keen eyes searching the trails.

The *rurales* rode up in an hour.

They called on the little group to surrender. The bandits just laughed and started to sell their lives as dearly as possible. The Mexican government ain't gentle with bandits. When they get trapped, they might as well see it through.

These did.

I surveyed the wreckage afterward. The little gambler was there, and a couple of others, but there wasn't any sign of Pedro.

I looked at Phil and he looked at me.

"Suppose he could have laid low on that ridge and started the others with the horses?" I asked.

Phil thought things over, then he nodded.

We rode back, and the trail told us what we wanted to know. One of the horsemen hadn't started with the others. He'd kept up on the ridge, probably playing dead. Then, after the galloping horses had decoyed us into pursuit he'd come to life, gone down, got his own bronc and rode away by himself.

But he hadn't ridden toward the *hacienda*.

Pedro must have known the game was up at last. He was headed into the hills, straight for the border desert country. A man could live a long time in that country.

Phil and I looked at the ridges. The trail followed the cañon. There was no use following it, while there was one chance in ten on the ridges.

"You take the left, me the right," I said.

Phil nodded, filled up his cartridge belt from his saddle bags and took the ridge. I took the other.

I didn't see anything. Once I thought I heard shooting.

When it got dark I gave it up and made a camp. The next day I backtracked into the *hacienda*. The *rurales* were in charge.

"Got clean away," I reported.

Phil was there. He didn't say anything.

I noticed a bullet had splintered the horn of his saddle and there were two shells missing from his belt.

"Any action, Phil?"

He shook his head.

"No. And I'm glad, too."

"Why glad?"

"Oh, under the circumstances, I wouldn't want to go through a lot of red tape. I wasn't a regular officer, you know, just a special guard, and I was off duty."

His words sounded sort of casual. I took a good look at the splintered saddle horn again. Then I climbed a peak and got out my binoculars.

Far off toward the east I could see a little bunch of circling dots, swinging, twisting, spiraling, settling. It was along the ridge Phil had taken, and they were turkey buzzards.

I PUT up my glasses, rode back to the *hacienda,* took another look at Phil's saddle, scratched my head. He saw me, and came out.

"Close call," I said.

He nodded.

"Guess the New York office will want a report on what's happened," I said. "Would you like to write it?"

He shook his head.

"Saw some buzzards over the east ridge," I hinted.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah."

"Ever see the president of this company?" asked Phil.

"No. Why?"

"He's a pot-bellied cuss that's awful cold-blooded. Know what 'd happen if you'd bumped off Pedro and reported it?"

"Reward?" I asked.

"Naw. He'd fire you to cut down the overhead. He'd figure that with the bandit dead there was no need of a guard."

"How about you?" I asked.

"I'm quittin' the guardin' business. Dixie and I are gettin' married."

I got to thinking about those buzzards some more. Then I got to thinking about what Phil had said. He'd met the president, and he knew. After all, there was that time they'd deliberately cut the force in two and left me without any reënforcements. I decided I wouldn't ride over toward the east ridge.

That's why I'm still chaperonin' the gold shipments for the Dry Canteen Mine. It's been a year since the big scrap, but they're afraid Pedro may show up again, and they keep me on the pay roll.

There's strange things happen down here in the border country.

The girl? You mean the blonde? Her father went through bankruptcy, lost everything in the crash.

Where is she now?

Oh. See the third one from the end there, the house girl that's solicitin' dances for a cut on the drinks, the washy-eyed blonde? That's her. She and Pedro decoyed Walter Hedley into the holdup, then tipped off the *rurales.* That got rid of Walter. Pedro was to marry the girl—or said he was.

She was Pedro's last fall guy. That's why I started to tell you about this border country. It's a queer place.

THE END.

How could he resuscitate her on that wave-drenched rock?

The Radio Gun-Runners

Viking swords and sails prove weak defense against gangster machine guns as Scarface Boston Jimmy flees his mutinous lieutenant in the weird prehistoric world inside the Earth

By RALPH MILNE FARLEY

Author of "The Radio Flyers," "The Radio Planet," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

JIMMY LEFAVOUR, best known as Scarface Boston Jimmy, and his crew of gun-runners hijack the yacht Miami, off Newfoundland, and transfer the guns from their sinking boat. The Miami is caught in the polar ice, and an opening to the northward leads them over the edge of the world. They find that the story of the Radio Flyers, who claimed there is no north pole, was true. Instead, there is a huge opening over whose rim the sea flows into the inside of the earth, which is a hollow shell with a small central sun.

Here they find the continent inhabited by prehistoric beasts, and fought over by Vikings and the Eskimo-like natives, the Skraelings. The Vikings are ruled by their boy bishop, Nils Uppri, and their *yarls*, or earls, among

This story began in the Argosy for February 22.

whom are the Radio Flyers, Eric Redmond and Angus Selkirk.

Nick Fratelli mutinies and gets away with the Miami. Scarface, with the Harvard yachtsman Tom Jones, the Cambridge cop Mike Murphy, and Scarface's fellow-gangster Little Arty, ex-jockey and radio bug, join the Vikings of Angus Selkirk's plateau city. Theresa Ferreira, daughter of the late navigator of the Miami, is with them, and seems attracted to the young Bishop Uppri, much to Tom Jones's discomfort; but she learns his title, and is horrified, despite Nils's attempts to convince her that Viking bishops are not celibates, being regarded more as kings than religious dignitaries.

Nick Fratelli has joined Altoonah, the crippled Skraeling chief, in an attempt to kidnap Eric Redmond's Norse wife, Helga. Scarface, with Swede Johnson, who has joined the Viking side to free Helga from Nick, rescues a Viking barge which has been riddled by the Miami's machine guns.

Terry Ferreira, Borghild Hoglund of the plateau city, and Bishop Uppri, are alone left alive on the vessel; and Scarface has barely raised the sail when Fratelli spots them, and starts in pursuit with the Miami.

CHAPTER XVII.

INTO UNKNOWN SEAS.

"GET BELOW!" shouted Scarface, as the rattle of the Miami's machine gun started, and the leaden hail began splashing about the stern of his fleeing Viking ship. "I'll steer until they get me, damn them, then Swede can take the oar—one by one, as long as there are any of us left."

"And not fight back, chief?" exclaimed Swede in surprise.

Helga said something in Norse to her girl cousin, and then to Swede.

"She says," translated the latter, "that Borghild and she can take turns at steering, so we two men can use the rifles."

"Fair enough!" agreed Scarface. "Let's go!"

And soon Borghild Hoglund was clinging to the long oar which passed through the ring in the stern, while Helga and the two gangsters were lying on the deck beside her, the men discharging clip after clip at the oncoming Miami. It must have taken considerable courage for Borghild to expose herself thus, while her companions lay in comparative safety; but it was necessary; and she was a Viking.

The stream of bullets from the machine gun found the stern of the barge, and rose slowly toward its four occupants. Borghild shrank involuntarily at her oar, but the two riflemen kept coolly at their work. Although their Springfields slightly outranged the 30-caliber machine bow gun, yet Cicero and Friday had the advantage of being able to play their weapon like a hose. Once let them get completely within range, and the annihilation of the fugitives would be sudden and complete.

A stray soaring shot nicked Borghild, and she toppled. Disregarding the pursuing bullets, Jimmy sprang to his feet and caught the falling body in his arms, while Helga manned the oar, and Swede kept up his fire.

The rattle of the machine gun stopped, as Friday dropped, wounded, to the deck of the Miami. But Altoonah took the wheel, and Nick Fratelli, in person, stepped on deck to assist Cicero with the deadly weapon.

"Get him, Swede! Get the Rat!" urged Scarface, as he lowered Borghild to the deck and frantically searched for her wound.

Tat-tat-tat-tat! began the machine gun—then stopped abruptly, as Cicero Tony clapped his hand to his chest and staggered backward, falling in a heap on the Miami's deck.

"I tank I vinged his sore shoulder," grinned Swede.

But it was soon evident that Cicero was merely incapacitated as a machine gunner, rather than put out of business. Fratelli assisted him into the pilot-house, and then emerged with Altoonah (crutches and all), whom he seemed to be frantically instructing how to feed the piece.

At this moment Borghild came to her senses. She had been shot through the calf of one leg, and had merely fainted. Helga peremptorily sent her below to relieve Terry in caring for Nils. When Terry came on deck, Helga dropped prone on the deck and picked up the rifle which Scarface had been using.

Tat-tat-tat! went the machine gun again.

Crack! spoke Helga's rifle.

Swede and Altoonah rolled on their respective decks, each clutching at his throat.

"Dey got me, I tank," groaned Johnson hoarsely, then coughed up some blood.

Helga dropped her rifle, and took the wounded man's head in her lap. He smiled at her and patted one of her arms with his hand.

"Lady," said he, "I tank I vorship you."

Then a paroxysm of bloody coughing ensued, his body stiffened, then went limp.

The Norse princess lowered his head softly to the deck; and, with fire in her eye, picked up her rifle again.

"Viking!" she announced proudly.

NICK FRATELLI had disappeared. Scarface and Helga kept up a steady fire on the windows of the pilot-house of the Miami, but that craft continued to overhaul them. In spite of the fact that Scarface now had two available riflemen to the Miami's one, yet if the Miami once got alongside, its squad of Skraelings could undoubtedly board them and overpower them by sheer weight of numbers; and this quite evidently was Nick Fratelli's plan.

With Swede Johnson dead, further communication between the Americans and the Vikings on board the Norse ship was rendered impossible.

"I'm going up in the bow," explained Scarface to Terry, "so as to prevent their landing there."

Then he left. Helga started to follow him, but he motioned her back. She flashed him a look of supreme contempt. Leaving two women to protect him, was he, while he took to cover? But when the Miami ranged alongside, and he opened fire from his new position, she understood, and was ashamed of having doubted him.

The Miami was now directly opposite them on the port side, and began slowly to draw in closer. Yet still not a head showed anywhere, for fear of Jimmy's and Helga's marksmanship.

Scarface caught sight of Nick's face in a mirror hanging in the pilot-house of the Miami, and instantly shattered the glass with a bullet. Fratelli had quite evidently been using that mirror to steer by, and his task would from now on be rendered more difficult.

And then a new and unmistakable note was heard in the chugging of the

Miami's motors. Jimmy cocked his ears, and then nearly laughed aloud.

"Keep it up, Terry," he shouted. "They're out of gas!"

Terry nodded, and clutched her oar tighter. But Fratelli also suddenly realized the situation, and swinging his helm sharply, attempted to bear directly down on them. It looked as though he were going to make it, although his engines were now coughing and missing. The engines stopped, but the Miami had sufficient steerage-way to carry her bow squarely into the stern of the dragon ship, unless something happened to prevent.

Shooting a whole clip into the windows of the pilot-house, Scarface reloaded and hurried aft; while on board the Miami, the Skraelings surged on deck and opened fire—quite aimlessly, however.

"Starboard your helm!" shouted Scarface.

"How?" shouted back bewildered little Terry.

"That way! Push your oar that way! Hard!"

Theresa obeyed, with every ounce of strength that was in her, and the stern of the Norse ship swung suddenly to port out of the path of the oncoming Miami, just in time.

As the Miami swept by under their stern, Scarface arrived on the run beside Terry and Helga.

"Straighten her up again," he shouted, but Terry needed no command, for the steering-oar swung around of its own accord in hands too tired to prevent, and the ship under the influence of the wind automatically resumed its e a r l i e r course. Scarface dropped on one knee and let the Skraelings have a full clip, whereupon they broke and crowded back into the cabin of the Miami.

"We've won!" Scarface shouted. "Licked 'em to a frazzle!"

But Terry interrupted with, "Gee, Mr. Jimmy, look!"

He looked. The Miami had swung around again, so that its bow was pointing toward them, and its inertia was still carrying it in their wake. Nick Fratelli and Cicero Tony Schultz were at the machine gun, and still well within range.

"Duck!" shouted Scarface, grabbing both girls and dragging them with him into the hold, just as the gun let loose.

THE bullets pattered on the stern, and tore through the planking, but those in the hold of the Viking barge piled up sleeping mats and crawled behind them before any harm had been done.

"A narrow escape!" breathed Scarface Jimmy. "Now all we've got to do is lie low until the wind pulls us away from them. But, if we had only seen those two before they got to the gun, it would have been a different story. Too bad!"

Presently the patter of the bullets ceased, and then the *tat-tat-tat!* of the machine gun itself ceased too. They were out of range at last, and Nick the Rat knew it.

The young Nils was feeling much better. Although he had chafed at being out of the fight, his cockiness had been completely destroyed by the fatal outcome of his venture; and so, being weaponless, he had made no attempt to come on deck during the recent battle. Helga dressed Borghild's wound, and then she and the two Americans laid out all the remaining bodies, including poor Swede's.

As they were completing this sad task, Theresa remarked, "It must be

nearly night; see how dark it's getting."

But it was not the darkness of night, for night never comes within the earth. Instead, it was an impending storm. Drops of rain began to fall, and they could hear the wind howling overhead, as it swept by in the higher strata at even a faster rate than it was blowing on the surface of the sea.

"*Komm!*" ordered Helga, as she led them forward to the mast, and indicated that the sail must be lowered at once.

But not clear down, for they must have steerage-way, to keep them heading with the wind, and thus avoid getting broadside to the waves, and foundering. Accordingly they furled the gaudily striped sail down to the lowest reef.

Meanwhile the day grew blacker and blacker, the nearest thing to actual night which the Americans had seen since entering the interior of the earth. The wind was now from the north; rain fell in slanting torrents, while the Viking barge scudded along before the fury of the blast, with the Norse bishop, the two Norse women, little Terry, and Scarface Boston Jimmy taking turns, two by two at the steering-oar.

They spoke little during that storm, partly because Fate, in removing Swede Johnson, had removed the only bridge which spanned the linguistic gulf between the three Vikings and the two Americans, but mostly because they were too busy and because the roar of the wind and the rain drowned out their voices.

HOW long the storm continued will never be known. Shift after shift, they all labored to hold the ship with the veering wind. Drenched, chilled, exhausted, they labored on. It all seemed like a nightmare, an unending treadmill. Of the five, the three Vikings stood it the best, for they were used to timeless time.

When it became evident that the storm was to continue indefinitely, they reluctantly heaved all the bodies overboard, Bishop Nils reciting the liturgy for death at sea. And, after all, what burial could be more fitting for these brave seafarers than to be sent to the bottom of the ocean amid wind and driving rain?

While, two by two, they clung to the straining stern-oar, the members of the party who were temporarily off duty, ate, or tried to dry themselves, or dozed fitfully. As shift dragged after shift, they devoted more time to dozing, until finally everything degenerated into a weary round of steering, dropping exhausted to the deck, stupor, and being awakened to steer again.

The one and only redeeming feature was that there is nothing better for wounds than rain. Ask the men who have been left outside of emergency dressing stations in France, so hopelessly wounded that men with lesser injuries, men whom there was hope of saving, were treated first. Yet some of those who were given up have been miraculously kept alive, their wounds dressed by a timely downpour. They know!

At last the five voyagers completely lost awareness of events.

Presumably they continued their cycle of duty as in a trance, but this can never be known. Scarface afterward remembered the round of steering and sleeping; then came an absolute blank. And then—

Swimming in the angry surges!

He did not even remember the boat crashing. Merely that he woke up to find himself struggling in the surf.

And still the black, black night of storm.

A wave hurled Scarface against a rock, stunning him. But he managed to crawl upon the rock and hold on. It was small, scarcely five feet across, and every wave washed over it; but it was rough, and so afforded a handhold and a foothold.

Then the darkness grew lighter. The rain ceased, although the wind still drove on. Looking back into the teeth of the gale, Scarface saw a woman's body floating directly toward his rock, with her golden hair spread out like seaweed awash.

In an instant, he had plunged into the water to windward, to intercept the body and prevent its dashing against the rock. As he staggered back, beaten by the waves, with the body in his arms, he saw that it was Borghild.

There was no sign anywhere of Nils, Helga, or Terry.

A few splintered boards, floating by, were the only relics of the Viking ship.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BACK IN THE COAL AGE.

THE rain had completely ceased. The wind was dying down. But the surges of the angry sea continued to break over Scarface's standing-place.

The body he clasped was that of his beloved Borghild. Was she dead? And, if not, how could he administer first aid on that wave-washed rock?

Shaking the water out of his black beard, he glanced around him in despair. To the leeward, through the mist and spray, he finally made out a spit of sand not wholly covered by the waves. It was her only chance for life!

So he plunged into the surf with his precious burden and tried to swim. He was rapidly carried, more by the waves than by his own exertions, toward that bit of land. He reached it. He stumbled to his feet, only to be immediately beaten down again. He staggered inland, with her body thrown across one of his broad shoulders, her arms and head and golden tresses hanging down behind, one of his arms hooked across her knees, his other arm fending before him. Thus he made the shore.

There was no barrel to roll the body on, but he reflected that the jouncing which it had received upon his shoulder going through the surf had probably been sufficient to discharge all the water from the lungs.

So, quickly laying Borghild face down upon the sand, he turned her head on one side resting on her arm, forced open her mouth, and gave a pull at her tongue to clear her air passages. Then he knelt astride her legs, placed both his hands, with fingers widespread, about her short-ribs, and commenced a slow rhythmic pressure and release.

All this he did with machine-like precision, as though the saving of lives from drowning was an everyday routine affair with him. And yet his mind seemed strangely detached from the whole performance. While his indomitable will was driving his body to perform these acts, his mind was saying over and over again: "I love her. I love her. Oh, God—have pity on me—help me to save her! Give her back to me."

As a matter of fact, this was the first time that Scarface Boston Jimmy had ever tried to resuscitate any one. He had not even ever practiced it. But in his avid reading, and his insatiable

search for knowledge, he had salted away the needful information, and now he remembered it with surprising accuracy.

After awhile he became calmer, and began to consider the situation, as he toiled.

"The books said," he ruminated, "that people have been brought to, after even three-quarters of an hour of this."

He looked instinctively at his wrist-watch, which was still running, in spite of this, its second immersion. Then he set his jaws.

"I shall not stop until I drop! Oh, my Borghild, come back to me!"

The artificial respiration continued. An ordinarily strong man ought to be able to keep this up almost indefinitely, but Jimmy had been steering the Viking ship day after day through the storm, until he had become unconscious with the strain, and then had been forced to swim for his life. He was water-logged and weak. The rhythmic motion would not keep up, as it should, by mere virtue of its own rhythm; it required the constant attention of his mind and will.

BUT his hands were becoming numb. He could no longer feel the cold girlish form beneath his outstretched fingers. Excruciating pain shot from his elbows to his shoulders and across his back, until the numbness, creeping up his arms, began to deaden the pain. The back of his head ached dully. It was difficult to keep his eyes open. His breathing became dry and choked.

He wanted—oh, so much—to collapse beside the body of his Borghild, and sleep there forever. Time and again he shook himself awake, on the verge of dozing.

He could no longer control his fingers, and suddenly he realized that he was kneading merely with his wrists, with the ends of the bones of his lower arms. It was as though his hands had gone.

This realization horrified him and brought him to his senses for a moment. Then the numbness reached his elbow-joints, and he could no longer push at all.

Shocked, despairing, but undaunted, he leaned forward to take up the forlorn task with his elbows against her ribs; but the attempt threw him off his balance, and he fell forward prone on the sand, beside the body of the girl he loved.

He struggled to rise, but could not, and so lay still. His head swam, his senses reeled, his eyes clouded. Through the mist, he could hear an angel-voice calling:

"Yimmy! Yimmy!"

It was Borghild, welcoming him to heaven. Then he knew no more.

The next thing that he realized was that he was suddenly and completely awake. He was lying on his side in the sand. The pale, quiet face of the Viking maiden was within a few inches of his own.

The blue eyes opened, and the lips smiled a little wan smile.

"Yimmy," she breathed.

With a superhuman effort, he craned his neck forward and kissed the blue lips, whereat a slight flush mantled her white cheek. Then his head fell back again upon the sand.

After a time, he opened his eyes again, and looked at her, but he had no energy for any further bodily movement than this. Her eyes were closed now, but her chest was regularly rising and falling. As he gazed, however, she sighed deeply and stopped breathing.

The sight galvanized Jimmy to action. Dragging himself to his knees, he tried to wrap his nerveless arms about her. Failing this, he leaned over, caught himself with one shoulder against the sand, and covered her pale face with kisses.

Another deep sigh, and her regular breathing began again. Her eyes opened, and again she blushed.

"That'll bring the blood back to your cheeks!" exclaimed Jimmy, joyously, as he struggled to his feet.

With a supreme effort, he lifted his arms aloft and threw every ounce of his will into an attempt at wiggling his fingers.

Slowly the fingers began to move. Pins and needles shot from his shoulders to his finger-tips, as the circulation painfully resumed its course. Gradually the control of his muscles returned.

After one last spreading and stretching of every finger to its utmost, he stooped and gathered Borghild in his arms. She was still alive but very weak. It was imperative to get her somewhere at once, where she could have warmth and dry clothes and rest. Hot-water bottles for the soles of her feet, dry blankets over her, warm bouillon to drink, and all that sort of thing.

The gangster bent over and kissed her again, then looked around. The sun was still clouded. The wind had died down to a gentle breeze, but great rollers still burst upon the beach and dashed the spray across the spit of sand on which he stood.

Far off, a mile or so away, the sandbar joined at right angles a tree-clad mainland, a vast continent evidently, which curved ever upward in the distance, until it merged with the heavens above. Toward this mainland Scarface set resolutely forth with his limp burden. But the sand was soft and shifting, and many times he was forced to lay her down and rest, ere he reached his goal.

As he neared the woods, they did not appear as inviting as they had from the distance, for they were unlike any woods which he had ever seen before. Huge ferns as tall as elms. Palm trees even taller. Between the trees rose club-moss and lichens almost as tall as the ferns, forming an impenetrable-appearing thicket.

SCARFACE felt suddenly dwarfed, like Alice in Wonderland. Even the sand at his feet bore out the illusion, for it was large and pebbly, and strewn with periwinkle-shaped shells the size of a man's head. Along the edge of the wood flew dragon-flies as large as eagles. Scarface began to wonder if he and his fair companion hadn't perhaps shrunk to midgets, after all.

The beach by the edge of the wood was high and untouched by the spray. The central sun shone hotly down. So Scarface laid Borghild tenderly on the sand, and removed her wet clothing as far as was decent. Then stripping some palm-fronds, he improvised a clothes rack and wrung out the wet garments and hung them to dry.

Borghild lay listlessly and watched him. When the wash had all been put out, he felt of the girl's hands and feet. Icy cold, in spite of the tropic warmth. Tenderly he chafed them, until she too began to recover her normal temperature. Not until then did he make an attempt to dry some of his own clothes.

Then languid and peaceful—for the pangs of hunger had not yet begun to assail them—the two lay side by side on the sand in the warmth of the life-giving central sun. They had each

other, which was something, in their grief for their lost companions. They drifted weakly off to sleep, without realizing that they were doing so.

They awoke æons later, rested and ravenous.

What awakened them was a clattering of the pebbles, as though an army were on the march. The wind had completely died. The sea rocked almost imperceptibly with an oily swell. And up the beach from the sea, there advanced a far-flung skirmish-line of fish! Fish the size of horses, walking—actually walking, on pectoral and anal fins, like four legs—walking toward them from the sea, like some horrible cavalry of Neptune's lower depths.

The mouths of these fish were large, wide-open, as if grinning, lined with a serrated row of shark-like teeth.

Every once in a while, when two of this advancing horde would get too close to each other and bump together, they would snap viciously at each other, and then move apart again.

"This is no place for us!" exclaimed Scarface, leaping to his feet. "Come on!"

Stiffly the girl sprang up, and stood beside him.

"*Komm!*" said she, and held out her hand.

Together they raced up the beach to the very edge of the wood, looking for a place to enter. Meanwhile the menacing line of amphibious fish continued their relentless advance. A transition form, perhaps, of prehistoric life emerging from the sea to begin their own evolution into frog, reptile, bird, mammal, man, and even beyond.

Finally the two found a place where they could penetrate the protecting forest a little way. There they stopped, to see how far the fish would advance. But the fish did not come all the way. Instead, they lay down on the pebbles and basked in the sun.

"If they aren't going to eat us," remarked the man, "let's eat one of them."

So saying, he tore an extra-large frond from one of the palms, stripped off its leaves, and strode forth from his hiding place. The fish nearest him reared up on its front fins, standing almost as high as he did, and growled. Jimmy promptly whacked it across the snout with his stick, whereat it charged him.

He retreated slowly, belaboring the creature as he fell back. Several other fish near by, disturbed by the commotion, got clumsily to their feet and stared stupidly around. Jimmy thought of using his revolver, but decided not to waste any ammunition, unless absolutely necessary.

The front fins of the attacking fish gave way just as it reached the edge of the wood; and Jimmy, quick to sense his advantage, beat the beast violently about the head, until it lay panting on the ground.

Borghild, from within the wood, clapped her little hands with glee. She didn't know what the fight was all about; but, being a true Viking maid, she enjoyed a fight for the fight's sake.

HAVING got the huge fish at his mercy, Jimmy stepped into close quarters, drew his hunting-knife, and slit the huge creature's throat, so that the fierce head rolled severed on the ground.

Here was food, food in abundance. But for whom? Even as he arose from his gory job, the fish pack with roars and growls rushed forward, driving Jimmy back to the cover of the woods. Hungrily the cannibal amphibians fell

upon their deceased brother, and tore the body to pieces. All that trouble for nothing!

Borghild, not realizing the loss, was still applauding.

This would never do! There must be some way to get a victim and keep it from being devoured. Wait; he had it! Build a fire! Fire for two purposes—to cook one fish, and to keep the other fish away. It was worth trying.

So he waited until the ravenous pack of tiger-like creatures had gorged themselves—including eating several of their number who had been slain fighting over the feast—and had returned to their nap.

Without disturbing their slumbers, he stepped cautiously out of his hiding-place and, motioning Borghild to accompany and assist him, he began gathering driftwood which lay along the high-water line near the top of the beach. The fish occasionally growled or grunted as they came too near, but did not interfere with them.

When quite a sizable pile of wood had been collected, Jimmy shredded a few sticks for kindlings, and pulled out his patent cigar-lighter. But of course the thing wouldn't work, for it was sopping wet; Jimmy sadly realized that it would never work again, for the alcohol would evaporate before the water.

What did people do under such circumstances? They twiddled sticks, didn't they? He was prepared to try this as a last resort, but wasn't there some simpler way? Eric had used a burning glass, in the story, he remembered. Too bad he hadn't one.

A watch seems to be the involuntary answer to most questions. Ask a man the day of the week, or the latest quotation of General Motors, and he will—like as not—glance automatically at his watch, before answering you. In his perplexity, Scarface glanced at his watch, and it gave him the answer!

Instantly he smiled, whipped out his knife, and pried off the crystal. But unfortunately the lens wasn't thick enough to focus the sunlight into a spot sufficiently small for his purpose.

Borghild had been watching him with interest and understanding. Now she offered a suggestion.

"Yarl Angus," she began, followed by an utterly unintelligible string of Norse words.

Her companion shook his head.

"*Yee forstaar ikka,*" said he, grinning. It was his one Norse accomplishment—admitting he didn't understand.

So she snatched the watch-crystal from his hand, and made a motion as though pouring something into it. He caught on at once. Of course.

"Add water and serve," said he.

So, taking back the little piece of glass, he rushed suddenly between the dozing fish, down to the sea, where he filled his lens with water. But getting back wasn't so easy. He couldn't rush back through the pack without spilling the precious fluid, so he tried tiptoeing cautiously between them. But one of them, disturbed, snapped at his leg, and he jumped and spilled the water. He had to cut and run for the sheltering woods.

But again Borghild was helpful. This time she indicated his knife. When he gave it to her, she stripped a piece of bark from one of the trees, and with it she fashioned a rude cup. This would enable him to rush between the finny sleepers without spilling too much water.

"Say, you're a regular pal," he exclaimed.

The words meant nothing to her, but she understood the tone of voice, and so smiled.

"I've half a mind to kiss you for that," he continued.

So he did, and got his face slapped. They were getting on splendidly. The slap seemed to wipe out the affront effectively. She smiled again and handed him the cup. Once more he ventured down to the sea.

THIS time he got the water safely through. But before he lit the fire, he fashioned a second club, so that Borghild could help him "get" their dinner. For he noticed that the fish were beginning to become restless, which foreboded plenty of trouble.

The fire started readily enough in the shavings which he had made, but it required considerable care and coaxing from the two of them before it finally developed into a real blaze, for the surfaces of all the sticks and logs were soaking wet from the recent storm.

At last, however, the two of them arose from their preoccupying task well satisfied, and dusted off their hands and knees, preparatory to slaughtering their meal. Then they looked around for a likely victim.

Not until then did they notice a crunching of pebbles of which they had been only dimly conscious during all their fire-making. The fish were marching seaward again. Their dinner was leaving them!

With a howl of dismay, the two rushed down the beach, brandishing their clubs—to reach the edge just as the last amphibian slid clumsily into the ocean and mockingly disappeared from sight.

"Hell!" ejaculated Jimmy.

Borghild caught the tone, and uttered emphatically some equally questionable word in Norse. Then the two looked at each other and grinned. After the many hard knocks that Fate had handed them, the addition of one more was almost funny.

But the humor of the situation did not do away with its grimness. No food; no fresh water; nothing to do but sit down, wait, and take turns at watching until the walking fish should return for their next sun-bath.

But the question was: how often did these beasts come out to bask? It might be hourly, or it might be once in a lifetime.

Nor would the return of the fish provide any drinking water!

If they waited where they were, their food might come back to them, it is true, but they were in immediate need of fresh water. The absence of the carnivorous walking fish, while it deprived them of food, yet also permitted them the freedom of the beach. The obvious thing to do was to walk along the beach in search of a spring or brook. And, while they were about it, they might just as well walk northward, for that way lay home, though how many hundreds or thousands of miles away, the storm-tossed pair knew not.

So, gathering up the rest of their garments, they started out.

THE sun was hot, and they were tired, and weak, and hungry, and thirsty. Very hungry, and oh so thirsty!

They came at last to a ledge of rocks projecting into the sea. In hollows of the rocks were pools of rain-water, now rapidly drying, and hence very stale. But it was water, real water, and they drank deeply of it, and were much refreshed.

In salt pools further out, they found giant sea-snails alive. So another fire was built, up by the edge of the woods. There was no danger of setting these lush woods on fire, and no harm done even if they did so.

When the fire was fairly started, Scarface leaned against a tree for a moment. Instantly he found himself in the midst of a display of fireworks such as he had never observed in Chicago either on the Fourth of July or on a ward picnic. The air around him was completely filled with sparks, so that he could not see another thing.

As he vanished from sight in a shower of sparks, Borghild shrieked.

"Yimmy!" she called, and regardless of danger to herself, she rushed through the fireworks and flung her arms around his neck.

Her onslaught forced him back against the tree, and as he bumped it, another display of pyrotechnics ensued. Borghild shrieked again and clung to him all the tighter.

The sparks did not appear to have burned either of them; and Jimmy, always an opportunist, held the girl to him, and soothed and kissed her, without any remonstrance on her part. Whatever caused the fireworks, he liked the effect.

At last, somewhat calmed and reassured, she started to draw away, bashfully and a bit reproachfully. Whereat Jimmy had an idea.

The tree behind him appeared to be the cause of the fiery phenomenon, so he kicked it violently, and was rewarded by another shower of sparks, which sent Borghild once more into his arms.

But unfortunately Borghild soon caught on, and drew away from him, with an expression which said as plainly as words, "You're doing this on purpose, you know you are."

"Of course I am," said Jimmy aloud, and grinned his disarming grin.

The girl smiled, walked demurely back, and kissed him shyly, virginally, only to be immediately seized in his arms again and devoured, this time without either excuse or resistance. She was his, all his, from then on.

It may be possible to live on "bread and cheese and kisses," but the bread and the cheese form an indispensable part of such a diet. So the two placed some of the huge sea-snails, shell and all, on the coals of the fire, and smothered them in seaweed to roast. The result, to their relief, proved delectable.

After the meal, the two sat hand in hand for a while, just gazing out to sea. The water, lapping at the rocks, made a pleasing sound. The rocks and the sea and the beach, a pleasing sight. Peace at last, and love, after all that they had gone through.

AFTER a while, Jimmy got up. "Want some more fireworks?" he asked, and shook the tree.

Again a shower of sparks. The girl clapped her hands with glee.

The tree was a gigantic club-moss. Of course! Lycopodium. Jimmy remembered having read of the use of lycopodium powder in the manufacture of old-fashioned fireworks, and how boys would often gather club-moss in the woods and shake it over candle-flames. Well, here was lycopodium powder by the ton!

Walking along the beach a little way from the fire, he spread out beneath a lycopodium tree one of Borghild's voluminous garments, which he had been carrying, and then shook down about a bushel of the brown grains. These he carted back to near the fire, and he and the girl amused themselves for quite a while by tossing

handfuls into the fire and watching the results.

A fish jumped just beyond the ledge of rock. That gave Scarface an idea. So he bent a pin taken from one of Borghild's clasps, fastened it to a cord from one of her garments, baited it with a piece of sea-snail, and with care and patience, caught a fish for supper.

They stayed by the rocky ledge, fishing, cooking, eating and taking turns at watching and sleeping, until the fresh water in the rock-pools dried up. At last they determined to start north again.

They had gone only a short distance when they stopped, horrified; the way was blocked by a gigantic long-necked toad, about the size of a giraffe, hopping toward them down the beach.

Instantly they rushed to the fire and replenished it, relying on the traditional fear of animals for fire. But this prehistoric toad quite evidently had never heard of the tradition. He hopped leisurely up to the fire, and blinked at them first with one eye and then with the other.

Scarface put a protecting arm around the girl and drew her back. The beast reached one paw out and tentatively touched the blaze, then hastily snatched it back and shook it in a puzzled sort of way. Finally it reached its neck across the flames toward the pair.

It was evident that if the idea should penetrate the creature's thick skull to hop around the fire, they would be driven away from their only protection. Jimmy was just about to draw his revolver, when a better idea occurred to him. Beside them lay a pile of the lycopodium powder with which they had been playing. Seizing a double handful, the man threw it full at the beast, where it exploded.

With a frantic leap, which carried it clear over the two humans, the creature capered off down the beach to the southward at a rate of which they hadn't believed it capable.

"Let's go," shouted Scarface, and gathering up their belongings, the two hurried off in the opposite direction.

They hadn't walked more than two or three hours when they came to a wide river flowing to the sea, and completely barring their path. But that didn't dismay them so much as the fact that near them, on their shore of the river, were the remnants of a cooking fire!

It was bad enough to have to match their wits with the brute force of prehistoric monsters, but now they must contend with human intelligence as well; for this was no Viking land. The gangster searched among and around the charred embers for clews as to the type of beings who had camped there.

For a city-bred man, Scarface was developing into quite a woodsman. Necessity and a little experience can turn book-learning into real knowledge.

His search produced nothing, however, except two sizes of footprints.

"A cave man and his mate?" thought he. "But this is strange. We have seen no signs of any living creatures except mollusks, insects, fishes and toads. No mammals. No birds. Not even any reptiles. The trees are those of the coal age. I didn't know that man existed that long ago. This would certainly please the anti-evolutionists."

THE footprints led inland up the bank of the river; so Scarface decided that he and Borghild must cross the river at any cost; but when he investigated the edge of the

stream, he found the thick mud literally swarming with smooth-skinned, lizardlike, venomous-appearing creatures, which made it evident that swimming was out of the question, and that even launching a raft would be attended by grave danger.

Meanwhile the girl too was examining the footprints. Suddenly she gave a little cry of surprise and discovery. Jimmy came running. Both knelt on the ground, as she pointed to something.

Near the moccasin prints was the unmistakable mark of a thoroughly modern shoe! This was even better than Bryan's prehistoric horseshoe. And then the truth dawned on them.

"Theresa!" they exclaimed in unison.

Therefore the moccasined prints were either those of Nils and Helga, or of savages who had captured little Terry. In either event, they must follow. So, picking up their belongings, Jimmy and Borghild hurried inland along the river trail.

The path was a well-defined animal track, winding in and out through otherwise impenetrable jungle, but keeping fairly close to the river's edge at all times. Jimmy still had his automatic, with one clip of cartridges, but no more, the rest of his armament having gone down with the Viking ship. So he carried this weapon in one hand, in readiness for instant use, though he doubted if it would be of much value against the small-brained creatures of this past age.

About a mile inland the road rose and topped a small and relatively bare hill, on the summit of which they found the three persons whom they sought. So the footprints had actually been those of Theresa Ferreira, Nils Uppri and Helga Redmond. Evolution was still unchallenged by prehistoric shoeprints!

Loud and warm were the greetings as the two groups embraced. Then Helga and Nils explained to Borghild, and Terry explained to Scarface Jimmy, that the three had been washed ashore on a piece of wreckage which had served as a raft. Despairing of finding any trace of their two companions, the three had at once proceeded northward, until blocked by the river, and then had turned inland, hoping to find a ford.

They had made a fire with Eric's old burning-glass which Helga carried. They were now engaged in building a stockade, to protect them from predatory beasts, until such time as they could devise some way of crossing the river.

"Gee, Mr. Jimmy," concluded Theresa, "we must teach these guys to talk United States. I'm all fed up on listening to Svenska."

But he shook his head, and replied, "No. It will be more useful for us to learn Norse, which will come in handy if we ever get back to the plateau city."

"Gee, Mr. Jimmy," said she, "you don't think we maybe gotter spend the rest of our lives in this dump, do you?"

"Perhaps," he replied. "Who knows?"

CHAPTER XIX.

A PREHISTORIC SIEGE.

IT was some job building a stockade, with knives as their only tools. But it had to be done, and so it was done. Until it was completed, some one always remained on guard while the others slept.

Then two roofed shelters were erected within the stockade, one for the women and the other for the men. A little spring bubbled from the ground within their inclosure; it was this that had determined the location. The smooth-skinned lizards of the river proved not bad eating, but their only vegetable was heart of palm, as they didn't dare try anything else.

By tacit agreement, Norse was the only language used, even between the two Americans, who rapidly mastered at least the rudiments of the ancient tongue. Scarface was most attentive to Borghild, and Nils to Theresa, while Helga acted as chaperon.

Their clothing rapidly became simplified. By pooling all their dress-goods, they were able to fashion two simple tunics apiece. Helga and Borghild did their hair in two long braids, and Terry looked forward to the time when her now-scraggly bob would permit her to do likewise. Jimmy let his beard continue to grow, a magnificent black mattress, which concealed most of his scar; but Nils, having little facial hair because of his youth and blondness, was able to keep fairly clean-shaved with a knife, except for his drooping yellow mustache. Scarface and Theresa discarded their shoes and fashioned themselves moccasins and Norse leggings out of lizard-hide.

Their days were fully employed: hunting, cooking, expeditions to the sea for shell-fish and squid, strengthening their defenses, teaching and studying Norse—and making love. It was only in the last-named pastime that Helga could not share. At such times she was depressed, quite naturally, being separated hundreds or thousands of miles from her Eric. Were ships and gliders searching for her, she wondered, or would he think her dead? And, horrible thought, would he marry again? No wonder the love-making of the others, who seemed not discontented with this opportunity to get acquainted, rendered her gloomy.

They started building a large raft down at the beach, for they figured that it would be impossible to cross the rivers of this land, because of the slimy denizens of its mucky shores, but that it should be feasible to paddle out to sea and follow the shore.

One day one of the girls made an interesting discovery. For a mirror they had all had to use a little pool in the brook, halfway from the stockade to the river, and this was most inconvenient. But now Helga noticed that the inner bark, where it peeled dryly off one of the logs of the stockade, was shiny and silvery like tin-foil. This gave her an idea. As time hung heavy on her hands, she set about to put her discovery to practical use.

Finding another tree of the same species, she skinned some of the inner bark and let it dry. But the result was disappointing, for it dried all crinkly and rumpled-up, like used tin-foil.

However, the girl noticed that it shrank as it dried, and this gave her a further idea. She made a circular drum of palm-branches, like an embroidery-hoop, and on this she stretched some fresh inner bark. When this dried, it was taut and smooth, and lo she had a mirror!

With these various occupations, days and perhaps weeks wore on. The construction of a raft, and of paddles for it, was nearly completed at the beach.

ONE tragic morning, however, they awoke at cock-crow. Now, generally speaking, there is nothing strange or tragic in awakening in the morning at cock-crow. But in a

land where there is no morning, but rather perpetual noonday with the sun always at the zenith, and where there are no cocks to crow, nor for that matter any other birds of any sort, such a combination of circumstances is a bit unusual, to say the least.

Of course, there was no actual morning; merely the time for arising from sleep. The sun shone squarely overhead as usual. But, as to the cock-crowing, there could be no mistake. They all heard it. The two Americans were used enough to the barnyard variety to recognize the sound.

The crowing which had disturbed them was answered from another quarter, and then there was silence. Hastily the five dressed, and mounted upon the platform which ran around the inside face of their palisade.

At first nothing was to be seen, but soon there emerged from the jungle the most peculiar gigantic fowl-like creature that any of them had ever beheld. It looked for all the world like a plucked chicken from a meat market, except that it towered all of ten feet high. It had thick slate-colored skin; small arms bearing claws, instead of wings; and no comb.

Stretching its neck aloft, and standing on tiptoe, the reptilian fowl proceeded to crow, with a voice that shook the earth. The challenge was answered by another stentorian crow from near by; and presently a second similar beast came upon the scene.

The two reptiles crouched low, stretched their necks toward each other, and teetered in unison for a moment; then suddenly, as at a signal, leaped into the air together, striking at each other with huge spurs which protruded from the inner sides of their legs. The little arms were not used.

"Gee, Mr. Jimmy," exclaimed little Terry, quite forgetting her duty to speak only Norse, "this is some cock-fight!"

And so it was. The two creatures repeated their cycle of maneuvers over and over again, until one of them reeled backward upon the ground. Thereupon the other, disregarding all further formalities, kicked his prostrate foe about, until finally the body lay still. Then, standing in triumph upon the dead body, he gave one victorious crow, and waddled off.

The five spectators immediately shifted their interest from the thrill of battle to the prospect of a chicken dinner. Unbarring their gate, they rushed out and dragged the huge carcass within. But the victor, seeing his victim apparently alive and moving away from him, came running back with angry clucks, and nearly got in after his dead adversary, before they could close and bar the gate.

After a period of silence, Jimmy mounted the platform to see if the coast was clear again, and just barely escaped a vicious poke in the face from the giant gamecock, which had been standing quietly outside. The beast then stuck its head over the edge and tried to reach for Jimmy, who hastily scrambled down.

Thereafter, no one dared to get onto the platform, for fear of being pecked—and it would only take one peck from that great bill to kill a man.

But for the present the presence of their besieger didn't matter, as they busied themselves with cooking slices of his victim.

PRESENTLY they heard much clucking outside, and glancing through the cracks between the posts of their wall, they saw twenty or more similar giant fowl on the hill-

top. But these new creatures had shorter necks and no spurs, and were rather stouter in build than the two who had fought.

The reptilian family settled down and made a regular ogres' farmyard out of the entire open space around the fort. They became more and more inquisitive as to what was inside, especially after devouring the offal from the slain rooster which was thrown outside. Not only did they keep craning over the top of the palisade, and snapping at any one who ventured upon the platform, but finally they took to pecking at any one who even tried to peek at them through the cracks. It was a state of siege.

The supply of heart of palm gave out. The remains of the chicken meat spoiled, and had to be thrown away. It soon became evident that they would have to fight or starve, so they called a council.

"We must try to make our way through them to the raft," announced Scarface. "Yet we may not survive to reach the shore. Before I die, I should like to marry Borghild. Can it not be arranged?"

"It can," replied Nils, "for I am not only a bishop, but also the head of her family. However, you have no man to act as your best friend and recount to me your deeds of prowess, in order to obtain my consent."

"Need it be a man?" asked the gangster.

"It always has been a man, since the beginning of our race," replied the Viking.

"But need it be?" insisted Scarface. "Is there any rule or law, other than mere custom, which compels it?"

"No-o," hesitated Nils.

"Then, Helga, quick! Be my sponsor."

Helga smiled. She remembered how she had sent Eric Redmond to Nils, when the latter was still a boy, to ask him to vouch for Eric to her father, the Bishop Thorvald.

She reminded Nils of that episode, and then launched into a panegyric, in which Scarface Boston Jimmy's tales of his World War adventures and career as a Chicago bootlegger—all strangely garbled—were made a foundation for his bravely risking his life in the Viking glider against Nick Fratelli, his defense of the Viking ship from pursuit, his rescue of the girl whom now he claimed, and his woodcraft and leadership in their present predicament.

It was a stirring saga, and all present were much impressed, not the least of them Jimmy himself. Nils gave his consent, and the nuptials were rushed, for there was no time to be lost if they would escape before starvation overcame them.

Thus Borghild Hoglund, the Viking maid, became Mrs. James Lefavour.

WHEN the ceremony was over, Nils said, "I, too, wish to marry, if Theresa will have me. As bishop, I can ordain Jimmy to the Norse ministry, so that he can perform the sacrament. He is the nearest to a legal guardian that Terry has; and anyway, by virtue of being a bishop, I can appoint him to that position, too. Helga, will you sing a sister's praises of her brother, for Jimmy's ears to hear?"

Helga and Borghild smiled their approval. Scarface, however, was a bit appalled at the thought of himself, a bootlegger and gangster, receiving holy orders.

But little Terry interrupted. "Oh, Nils, I'm not sure, I'm not sure.

Aren't we rushing into this merely because we may be about to die? Please give me time to think calmly."

Nils pleaded with her in vain; then at last he put his arms around her protectingly.

"I'll wait."

Scarface then outlined the plan of attack. They were to wrap their spare garments about their heads for protection. Each was to carry a stout stick. He would begin by trying to shoot the rooster. Then they were to fling open the gates, throw the coals of their cooking-fire at the hens, and run the gantlet to the beach.

So Scarface mounted the platform; and, as the cock's head appeared, he discharged his entire clip in its hideous face. Blinded and squawking, the beast rushed away, and tore around the inclosure like mad, finally dropping in his tracks.

Then the door was unbarred; and, as the female reptiles made a rush for it, hot coals were shoveled in their faces. They withdrew, squawking, for a short distance; but, when the five humans emerged, the hens rushed back at them again.

Beating the hens about the legs, and on the heads whenever they stooped to peck, the five prisoners fought their way onward. But something like the senseless persistency which causes a modern hen to run across the road in front of an automobile caused these prehistoric creatures to go perversely in the opposite direction from that in which they were being driven.

Gradually the progress of the five humans slowed down. Gradually they tired. At last Scarface gave the command to fall back toward the palisade again. Soon they were within its protecting walls, with the gate barred once more; trapped by carnivorous reptiles of a bygone age.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

A Dye Made from Spiders

ONE of the strangest and most beautiful scarlet dyes in the world is cochineal, which is made from a tiny red Mexican spider termed by the natives *cochinilla*. These spiders abound in the State of Oaxaca, Mexico, and congregate by the millions at certain seasons of the year upon a variety of cactus called *nopal*.

The Indians, equipped with earthern pots and brushes, harvest the insects regularly. They search the countryside where this special kind of cactus thrives, brushing the spiders from the thick, spiny leaves into the clay receptacles which are then thrust into hot ovens for a moment in order to kill the insects. The dried bodies are then pressed into small cakes and sold, furnishing the celebrated dye of commerce from which they take their name.

During recent years the aniline dyes have greatly lessened the value of cochineal, with the consequence that its use has very much diminished. However, the insects are still gathered in many parts of southern Mexico, the Indians using the dye to color their soft, hand-woven blankets or *serapes* for which the State of Oaxaca is renowned.

Gerald FitzGerald.

"If you're not back with the money in five minutes—"

The Price of a Ride

There was something phony about this fare, thought taxi driver Buck Neilsen; but he didn't know the half of it

By WILLIAM CORCORAN

IT had been cold at daybreak, when Buck Neilsen had first set out in his battered Shaw taxicab to rove the streets of the city in search of business. At noon New York was, if anything, colder. Yet Buck Neilsen gave little thought to the temperature—he was accustomed to it, and even welcomed it as a harbinger of profit. Right now he had something far more disturbing on his mind.

He had stopped with the traffic on Grand Concourse when the green light changed to red at Fordham Road. Alongside, another cab halted. Its driver was slightly familiar to Buck from encounters on downtown hack lines. They had grinned recognition, and exchanged comments on the weather and the state of business. The other, red-nosed but cheerful, predicted a record day. Buck agreed. He was, at the moment, sitting on top of the world.

Then the driver glanced within Buck's cab. It contained two passengers. Buck knew nothing about them except that they were ill-clad, thirty or so in age, and possessed of faces of a singularly hard cast. With the window closed he had heard nothing of their conversation.

The other driver's manner underwent a strange alteration as he stared at the two passengers. His eyes widened, and his mouth went slightly slack. His gaze returned suddenly to Buck; he hesitated, seemed on the verge of speech—and at that moment the traffic officer's whistle set every car in motion. The other driver stepped on the gas, and swiftly was lost in the charging traffic. Buck frowned in puzzlement, tried to conceive what had possessed the other, and then sought to dismiss the matter from his mind and concentrate on his task.

Buck found the last feat too difficult. His passengers had provoked some troubled thought even at the moment they hailed him. There was something queer about this ride, and Buck did not like things to be queer about his livelihood. He had been long enough a hackman to entertain apprehension at such times.

Now Buck was far from timid by nature, and apprehension had only come with the chastening influence of experience. He was twenty-five, a tall, rangy, wide-smiling man with sandy hair and tolerant, amused eyes. He enjoyed the work, the movement and excitement of it, and he worked hard.

His industry had an object, for he saved every penny he could lay hands on against the day when he should return home to a certain small town in Pennsylvania where a girl awaited him and where there existed a fine opportunity for a young man familiar with cars to open a garage and service station. Buck was ambitious, and he let no obstacle venture between him and his aim. He was close to its achievement, and impatient.

This morning there had come to Buck such a stroke of luck as visits every cab driver occasionally. He had a call that took him northward beyond the city limits into Westchester County. A woman desiring to transport her dog to the country had availed herself of the quickest and simplest method.

On his return, keenly satisfied with her liberal payment for the service, Buck passed through Mount Kisco, still a good hour's drive from New York. On the outskirts of that town he spied two men standing beside the road, watching the approaching vehicles. Buck scrutinized them with a true hackman's instinct for business, though he scarcely expected them to hail a cab foreign to the countryside. To his surprise they did, deliberately signaling him to halt.

BUCK'S heart leaped with an unfamiliar thrill. He had been granted long rides before, but never had he found a return ride in the country. He stopped beside the pair.

"I have to head back for the city," he warned them. "That where you want to go?"

They grinned at him. They were lean, garbed in shabby, oddly assorted clothes, pallid of face, and shivering with cold. One was several inches taller than his companion. The shorter had a face of cunning sophistication; the other, of callous, hard humor.

"You're exactly the guy we want," said the taller. "Keep right on going. And when you hit the city, head for the lower East Side."

"O K!" said Buck cheerfully. He swung open the door, and they hurried within, eager to be out of the cold. Buck went on in high spirits.

It was only after they had gone some distance that he began to question the circumstances of this ride. Why, for instance, would two men desirous of

traveling to New York stand waiting for a taxicab by the roadside, where a city cab would be the last vehicle in the world to expect? Why did they not take a train, as any rational person would do? Further, they were a pair of hard-looking customers. If their clothing, on this chill winter's day, was any indication, could Buck be sure that they had the money to pay for so expensive a method of transport?

Decidedly there was something queer about the ride, and Buck's sense of satisfaction with himself slowly but surely diminished as the miles rolled swiftly by.

And then came that unaccountable incident at Fordham Road. Buck could not expect, in the ordinary course of events, to run into that driver again for many days, and by that time it would be too late. If there was trouble brewing, Buck was going to know it soon.

Their destination, Buck learned in time, was an address east of Third Avenue below Twentieth Street. It proved to be a commonplace, if not dingy-looking, flat house with a small tailor shop on the street floor. The two men came out of the cab, and Buck jerked on the brake and stepped to the sidewalk with them.

"That 'll be nine-fifty," he announced. "That was quite a ride."

"How much?" asked the tall one. The shorter man hovered, anxious to scurry for shelter.

"Nine dollars and fifty cents on the clock."

"Is that all?" demanded the spokesman. "Hell, that ain't much! We can hang you up for that." He was grinning.

"Oh, no!" said Buck easily. "Nothing doing! I do business for cash only."

"What? No credit—even for us?" There was mockery in the tone. "Hell, that's tough! Well, I'll tell you what we'll do. You wait here while we go upstairs and get some jack."

Buck paused, studying the other's face.

"You mean you haven't got it?"

"Not on me, but we'll get plenty," assured the fellow. "You wait here—"

"Come on," urged the little man. "Don't stand there gabbing all day. Get it over with!"

"Wait a minute!" advised Buck. His eyes narrowed and there was a hardness about his mouth. "Just hold your horses. If you can get money upstairs, I'll wait. But I'm waiting no longer than five minutes. If you're not down with the money by that time I'm coming up after it."

"That's right!" agreed the big one. "You do that. But it's just too bad that we can't hang you up for it anyway. You wait here."

And he grabbed the smaller man's arm, and hurried into the house entrance beside the tailor shop.

BUCK permitted himself a sour smile, and climbed in behind the wheel. He might have known—he most certainly might have known! A pair of chiselers trying to get a free ride into town. Well, they had five minutes, and then they were going to learn whether or not Buck Neilsen's rig was a charitable institution. Buck felt grimly capable of handling the situation.

Buck was not overcome with surprise when the five minutes expired without word from his late fares. He let five more minutes pass, and then eased out of the cab. He felt cold, sitting quietly there. He gazed upward at the building. It was one of a

row of similar dwellings, all five stories high. That meant at least ten separate domiciles here, in any one of which the pair might now be warming themselves.

First of all, Buck made inquiry of the tailor. Had he seen the two men get out of the cab and go inside, and if so, did he know them? The tailor, a small absorbed Hebrew, looked up from his work short-sightedly and denied any knowledge of the matter. Buck left the shop and entered the hallway of the house.

The rows of bells and mail boxes told him nothing. He mounted a flight of stairs covered with tattered linoleum and found himself on a dimly lighted landing. The very walls reeked with two generations of cooking, washing, living. Buck listened to the dim sounds of human activities throughout the building, glanced up the staircase to the skylight, and then walked to the nearest door and knocked.

A woman answered, with a small child clinging to her apron.

"Did two men just come in here, ma'am?" Buck asked.

The woman stared, and uttered something unintelligible in a hoarse voice. Buck repeated his question; then shrugged with sour humor as he received the same reply. At least it sounded the same to him. The woman was talking in a foreign tongue, and evidently understood no English. Buck turned away.

He was worried now, seriously. It had seemed unlikely that those two could actually disappear within this none too large house, but if he were going to encounter many like the woman, he would be beyond his depth. He walked to the next door, and held his ear close to the panels. There were voices within. But they were plainly those of women engaged in some manner of domestic activity. He went on.

THERE were four small apartments on each floor, and Buck mounted all four flights, to listen before every door. He heard nothing at all encouraging. The situation took on ominous proportions. He could afford the loss of the nine-fifty, perhaps—had Buck been figuring in mere dollars. He could not afford to forget what the money would accomplish, so soon.

"I'll be eternally damned!" he told himself with mounting anger. "They're not in this house. But then where can they be?"

He was on the top floor. He looked upward. A ladder led to the door giving exit on the roof. He started up the ladder.

About him, as he stepped through the door, spread an expanse of chimneys and tin roofing painted red. The only person in sight was a youth blowing on his cold hands as he paused in the task of erecting a radio aërial. He glanced at Buck, and proceeded with his work.

"Did you see anybody come up here, son?" Buck called. The words were clipped—friendly, but to the point.

The boy stared, then nodded quickly. He jerked a thumb toward the adjoining roof, where a similar door led below.

"Two men?" Buck asked.

"Yeah! They crossed over and went down there."

Buck's jaw tensed as he smiled. There was no uncertainty now. He ran to the edge of the roof that overlooked the street, and peered over. He saw his cab, a few pedestrians, but no one resembling either of the pair.

"Well, damn them!" he uttered. "What a fine sap they've made out of me!"

He paused a moment, considering; then crossed to the next house and went below.

Starting at the top floor, Buck repeated his actions in this house. He went about the business with grim determination. It was a cleaner, more recently decorated building. Whether the doors were thicker or the class of tenants different, he could not tell, but he heard fewer voices behind the doors. He did not knock anywhere until he had reached the second floor. And there, in a flat above the street, he heard voices of men. He listened, ear close to the panels.

It was impossible to tell from the muffled sounds whether these were his passengers or not. He debated, reluctant to disturb an innocent household, but there was too much anger in him. He knocked, soundly.

The door opened after a pause, and a man peered forth through a narrow space. Buck could see nothing within but a wall which began alongside the door.

"Did two guys just come in here?" demanded Buck.

He edged a foot forward in the darkness.

"What two guys?" countered the man. He was a slight, beady-eyed individual, expensively but not very tastefully clothed.

"Never mind what two guys! I just asked a question."

"Well, to hell with you, big boy!" And the door moved to shut.

However, it did not close, for Buck's foot was thrust in the opening. He was furious, and in no mood to regard consequences. He heaved on the door with a shoulder, and flung the little man out of the way. The door swung wide. And revealed to Buck's gaze was a small room in which sat his two late passengers at a table with glasses of whisky in their hands. They turned, startled, and the tall man sprang instantly to his feet.

"SO you tried a sneak, eh?" demanded Buck between set teeth. "Well, I'm here, and I've come for the jack!" He advanced into the room.

"Is *that* so?" countered the tall man. There was no humor of any kind in his countenance now. It was ugly.

"You chiseler!" Buck snapped. "Come across!"

"Suppose we don't?"

Buck studied the fellow. He stood swaying, with his hands clenched at his sides. Apparently they were determined to carry out their bluff. Well, there was one way to handle that!

"Brother, if you don't you're going to be damned sorry — in just two minutes," Buck said softly.

The dapper little man stood by the door, immobile. At the table the second passenger remained seated, his cunning eyes darting swiftly between the two before him. He was smiling slightly.

"Get out of here, you sap!" the big fellow snarled. He came forward, inch by inch. His teeth were bared between cruel, twitching lips.

"You don't intend to pay at all then, eh?" Buck was smiling faintly now. His rangy body swayed ever so slightly. And suddenly he lashed out with a blow that crashed through the big man's instinctive defense and struck his jaw solidly, knocking him completely off balance. He careened into the table, toppled over a chair, and wound up against the window, the pane of which instantly shattered.

Fragments of glass showered to the sidewalk below.

The big fellow recovered quickly, and uttering a ferocious oath, charged back across the room. The smaller passenger darted up from the table, and sought refuge in a corner. Buck did not wait; he leaped forward and crashed into the big man's charge.

They reeled about the room, locked together, knocking over chairs, colliding with the table. A small rug became entangled in their feet. Buck grunted as the other's body blows struck him, and retaliated with short punches into the kidneys which caused no immediate damage but would wreak havoc in the long run. Buck knew what he was about.

Neither would release the other. There was not enough room for either to dare let the other emerge from the clinch. And then Buck proved that he knew what he was about by abandoning his attack suddenly, snapping back the fingers of the big fellow where they gripped him, and sending his antagonist from him with a quick, heaving shove. It was a gamble. The other swung blindly for Buck's face. It was Buck's chance, and he took it. A second time he lashed out his long right arm, and it landed on the button. The big fellow grunted, and crashed into a chair, splintering the legs. He rolled beneath the table and was still.

BUCK stood looking down at his victim, breathing hard. There was a light of satisfaction in his eye. He glanced over toward the smaller passenger across the room. And then he froze.

The smaller man was crouched in mingled fear and hatred, and there was a gun in his hand. He snarled.

"So you're the big shot of the party, eh? You're going to collect nine-fifty whether we've got it or not, eh? You lousy hooker, riding into town with an empty cab in any case! Well, try and get it now. Let's see you try!"

Buck did not move. His face was inscrutable, his body tensed and immobile. The beady-eyed man near the door barely breathed, a mixture of satisfaction and apprehension playing on his face.

It was a moment of intense drama, without sound or movement.

And then abruptly the door burst open with the smashing impact of a body against it, splintering the flimsy catch. Framed in the opening stood a policeman, young and keenly wide awake.

"What's going on here?" he demanded.

A queer, passionate look flashed over the face of the smaller man with the gun. He cursed, and spun about. For a fraction of a second he hesitated; then he raised the gun. The cop's hand darted beneath his coat.

From where Buck stood to the spot where the small man crouched was no extraordinary distance for an able man to jump, but it was a remarkable space to cross in a dive, especially when a table stood between. And it was in a dive that Buck made it, over the table in a clawing, furious lunge that brought down the small man in a heap before the trigger was pulled. Buck beat at him madly, grasping for the weapon, and let up only when he had the gun safely in hand. The cop did not move from the doorway, watching uncertainly, his own gun out now.

Buck rose from the floor. He viewed the small man with a contemptuous smile. The man remained as he had fallen, his eyes consumed with hatred and despair.

"Huh!" grunted the cop abruptly, coming into the room. His pistol menaced the terrified beady-eyed man, but his gaze was fixed on the man on the floor. "Well, I'll be damned! If it ain't Needle Peters! Needle Peters himself, of all the people to walk in on! Where's your pal Higgins?"

The man on the floor made no response, except to curse. Buck watched them both.

"Do you mean that lad under the table by any chance?" he suggested, pointing.

The officer glanced beneath the table.

"Well, I'll be damned twice!" he said in a voice of marvel. "Higgins himself, too! And out like a light. Was that what I heard?"

"It probably was," admitted Buck. "And who are Peters and Higgins?"

THE cop shot a glance at Buck.

"First of all, who are you, big boy?"

Buck thumbed his nickeled hack badge.

"I drive a rig. It's downstairs. I picked these guys up in Mount Kisco a couple of hours ago. They tried to stick me for the cab fare, and I came up here to collect."

"I see," said the cop, grinning as if he had a secret joke. He delayed commenting further until he had closed the door, and swiftly frisked the two small men for weapons. There were none.

"Only the one rod," observed the officer. "Believe me, if I'd known who was in here I'd have thought twice before busting in like that. I thought it was somebody murdering his wife or something."

"Why?" asked Buck. "Are these gorillas anybody of importance?" He was thinking of the cab driver on Fordham Road.

The officer gave Buck a smile, a hard and wise and very capable smile.

"In a way," he said. "But look here! You're anxious for your money, you say?"

"Take it from me—I am!"

"I guess you won't find any on these mugs," went on the cop. "They haven't had any lately, and haven't had a chance yet to pick up a bank roll. They needed a lift to the city in some inconspicuous way this morning, and I'll bet they rejoiced when you came along. You may have to wait a little to collect your tariff, but you'll get it. You saved my life beyond a doubt, and I'll gladly waive any claim to the jack there is in this."

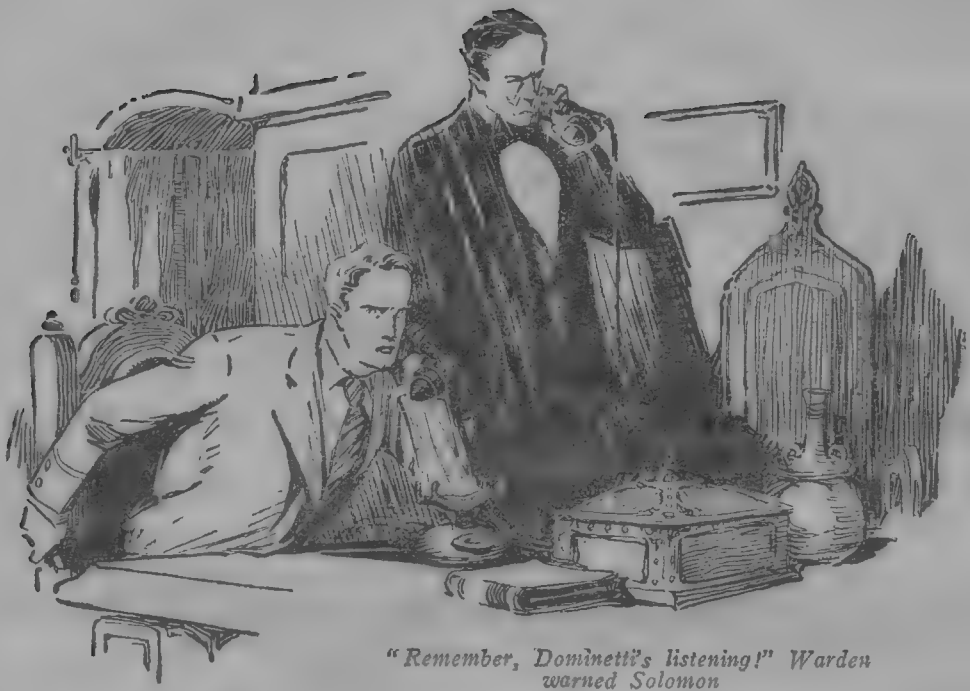
"In this?"

"They're still paying bounties on escaped convicts in this State, and these are two of the toughest hustlers who ever cracked their way out of the pen. The alarm has been out from Sing Sing for twenty-four hours for this pair. They're wearing clothes they stole last night, and if they had a couple hours more leeway we'd never have found them." The cop was exultant, for there was distinction to be gained from this capture, far more valuable to him than any bounty. Appreciation of Buck Neilsen's share warmed his voice:

"Well, they got a free ride down, and now we'll give them a free ride back!"

"And all I wanted was nine-fifty!" murmured Buck. He stared with wide-eyed and genuine astonishment at the convicts, now venomous with hate. Then he said slowly, feelingly; "What a hell of a price to pay for a ride!"

THE END.



"Remember, Dominetti's listening!" Warden warned Solomon

John Solomon's Biggest Game

Prisoner of the implacable intriguer Dominetti, Jimmy Warden faces disaster as the defenses of John Solomon crash in ruin

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Author of "Cyrano," "The Mysterious John Solomon," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

SIGNOR DOMINETTI, unscrupulous guiding genius of a vast organization of international crooks, has clashed many times with the mysterious cockney, John Solomon, whose power and organization are equally secret and incalculable.

But now Dominetti has struck, bombing and sniping Solomon's headquarters in all Europe's capitals, and killing his agents in various "accidents." Solomon marshals his forces against Dominetti's plot to place the sinister Grand Duke Basil on the Russian throne. The cockney induces Fascist Italy to back another claimant to the throne, Sergei Romanoff.

June Tully, *en route* to Solomon's headquarters in Paris with a formula of a mysterious destructive ray, is kidnaped by Frank Halsey, a Dominetti agent, but gives a copy of the formula

This story began in the Argosy for February 15.

to James Warden, a young American ex-diplomat, who takes it to its destination.

Later in the "Abode of Bad Spirits," an unsavory Parisian night club, Warden and another Solomon agent, North, outwit Halsey and June escapes. But Dominetti's men—the Russian Glazunoff and the Jap Matsura—gain their object; by capturing and torturing Solomon's chemist they discover the key word of the secret formula.

Meanwhile, Warden has penetrated Dominetti's Paris headquarters and obtained a copy of a hidden treaty between America and Great Britain which, if published, would plunge Europe into turmoil. He gives this document to June, with instructions to deliver it secretly to the American Embassy.

Later he is trapped by the treacherous Inspector Leblanc of the *Sûreté* and turned over to Dominetti. To gain time, the American pretends to be Sergei's spokesman, and Dominetti negotiates with him for a signed renunciation of Sergei's claim to the throne.

CHAPTER XVI.

CAPITULATION.

JIMMY WARDEN was stunned, incredulous, bewildered.

Even now, the morning after his telephone conversation with Prince Sergei, he could scarcely believe he had heard aright. He had read over the abdication, he had repeated the terms offered by Dominetti—and Sergei Romanoff had jumped at them, had swallowed hook, line, and sinker, almost frantically. His very voice had betrayed, all too clearly, his eagerness to grab at the proffered bait.

There was some trick about it, of course; yet on the surface Dominetti had played fair and probably would continue to do so. Warden's one hope now lay in Solomon. He had a firm belief that somehow, at the last moment, the pudgy little cockney would show up with an ace of trumps. Sergei had been swung one way, and might conceivably be swung another way; or the deal with Dominetti might be halted.

Warden breakfasted with Glazunoff, and the two men stepped into the garden for a smoke and a stroll. Glancing at the open doors of the garage, Warden saw his own—or rather, Solomon's—Hispano standing there, and this recalled Ahmed ben Zain to his mind. He asked Glazunoff about the Arab.

"We're holding him. He got a rap over the head, but is all right now."

"And when does the party take place? To-day is the twenty-fifth, I think."

"Basil will be here for luncheon," said Glazunoff. "The others meet here at three o'clock. You can settle your business at luncheon with Basil."

"I fancy it's already settled, if Dominetti says so."

Glazunoff merely laughed dryly.

The morning dragged. It was well past noon when Jimmy Warden received the expected summons, and descended to the salon where Glazunoff was mixing cocktails. Halsey was not present, nor did Warden see anything of him all that day until evening.

"This is Mr. Warden, gentlemen," Dominetti said affably. "As I have told you, he represents Prince Sergei—very agreeably to us. Grand Duke Basil of Russia, and Baron von Federn."

The three men bowed, appraising one another. The German baron was

a stiff, precise, silent man, speaking rarely. Basil, on the other hand, was a very handsome man of forty, cruelty lurking in his somber eyes, his mouth strong and passionate. Basil might be no angel, but he was certainly no weakling; Warden felt a keen regret that Sergei did not possess a bit more of his cousin's strong character.

They went in to luncheon, and Warden perceived that Dominetti had previously discussed him with Basil, for the grand duke showed no surprise over the capitulation of Sergei.

The meal passed with quiet talk, which revealed a most surprising knowledge on the part of Dominetti of nearly every important personage in Europe—an intimate personal knowledge, as of long acquaintance. When the meeting of the afternoon was mentioned, Dominetti nodded toward the American.

"I am going to ask Mr. Warden to be present at the meeting," he announced. "He knows already a large part of our plans, it appears, and it is just as well that he should know all. I hope to get in touch with Mr. Solomon to-night or in the morning, and settle matters with him—and it may be that Mr. Warden can be of mutual assistance. And now, if your highness is ready, we may touch upon the agreement with Sergei."

ONE of the Russian servants came into the room and spoke with Glazunoff, whose eyes went to Warden.

"Mr. Warden is wanted on the telephone."

"By all means," said Dominetti, making a gesture.

Warden rose and accompanied Glazunoff into the salon, and took up the instrument from the desk, while the Russian lifted the separate receiver from the rack and held it expectantly to his ear.

"Warden—oh, it's you, North! How's everything?"

"Fine," said North. "I'm at Rue Montorgeuil."

"Solomon there?"

"No," responded North. "I paid your bill at the Hôtel d'Angleterre and all's jake. I'm instructed to ask whether Dominetti will see me some time this afternoon or early this evening. Solomon wants to get in touch with him through me."

Warden glanced at Glazunoff inquiringly. The Russian nodded, his eyes gleaming.

"Seven o'clock."

"All right, come here at seven to-night," said Warden.

"Right," North responded and hung up.

"All's jake!" This meant but one thing, of course. North had received the message about the Hôtel d'Angleterre, had interpreted it aright, and had taken care of June Tully. And beyond doubt he was now in touch with John Solomon, since he was at Solomon's house.

Dominetti, with more than a hint of triumph showing in his vibrant gray eyes, confirmed the appointment made by Glazunoff.

"Excellent!" he exclaimed. "At seven to-night, we shall receive a capitulation from this mysterious Solomon—eh, Mr. Warden? Oh, you do not think so? Well, you shall see. And now let us get to business; it is necessary to have the document written, signed, and sent to Prince Sergei, as I am anxious to receive his abdication during our meeting. Boris, suppose you write it out. His highness can sign now, can send it for the other sig-

natures, and it can then go at once to Sergei."

Glazunoff wrote out the paper, in Russian, and followed the terms dictated by Dominetti. Warden perceived that Grand Duke Basil was none too happy about signing them, but dared not refuse. His signature was witnessed by Warden and by Baron von Federn; then Glazunoff, pocketing the document, departed to obtain the other signatures of the chiefs of Basil's party.

So, to the uneasy astonishment of Warden, the affair was concluded. He could discover no trick in the matter, yet was convinced there must be something shady in the transaction. It no longer bothered him greatly. June Tully was safe, well beyond the power of Dominetti, well beyond the reach of Halsey; and this counted for everything.

Then, North's message! Why was he coming here to-night, if not to present an ultimatum from Solomon? True, there had been no jubilation in his voice, yet it was now or never if action were to ensue; and Warden did not doubt for a moment that at seven that evening, John Solomon would deliver some blow to send all the enemy's finely planned schemes staggering into utter ruin.

So Mr. Warden was distinctly more cheerful as the day wore on.

THE meeting took place in the stately dining-room, about the lengthened table, and if the presence of Warden caused any surprise to the others, none betrayed it. Warden was thrilled—he might have been all his life in the diplomatic service with never a chance to participate in so historic a conference as this promised to be. These men might not represent his cause, they might well be enemies—yet the thrill was here.

Dominetti headed the table, and opposite him sat Grand Duke Basil. Also present were several Russians, heads of the aristocratic party who acknowledged Basil as heir to the throne. Von Federn sat silent, intent, alert. Here on the left was Baron Yamanaka, correctly frock-coated, smiling, a man empowered to speak for the Empire of the East. And opposite him, Fakri Pasha—a virile, handsome Turk, proud in his consciousness that at his back was the new and rising Eurasian power.

Last of all, into the room came a man whom Warden recognized with intense amazement—the last man whom he would have expected to see lined up with the Russian aristocracy. It was Emile Marconnet, a great leader of the French Socialist party, the man who held the balance of power in the Chambre, the enemy of militarism and political expansion, the most execrated and yet most potent man in all France!

As Marconnet took his seat, Glazunoff came in and leaned over Warden's shoulder.

"I have the document. Will you come and telephone Sergei?"

Warden assented. In the salon, he presently had Prince Sergei on the wire, and told him that the terms were signed.

"Very well," said Sergei's petulant voice. "They must be in my hands before I surrender the abdication. I cannot take chances. I must verify the signatures."

Glazunoff nodded, and Warden informed the prince that Glazunoff would come at once with the all-important document.

Hoping against hope, Warden returned to the conference, scarce listen-

ing to the pompous address being delivered by Grand Duke Basil. So Sergei would not take his word for it! Good. Perhaps it was all a ruse, perhaps Sergei would not yield the abdication, perhaps Dominetti would find himself balked at the last moment. There was still a chance!

The conference was unhurried. Wine was served, but tasted sparsely. One man after another spoke; Dominetti held his peace, patient, letting the others exhaust their oratory. Then, when his moment came, he was on his feet, speaking curtly, with dynamic force that fairly swept the table alert and into a wave of energy.

"Gentlemen, let us get down to facts," he said, and his voice shook them all with its trumpet-like vibrancy. Never had Warden more fully realized the essential power of quiet restraint. "We know for what purpose we have met here. Within six months the reign of chaos will be ended in Russia, and the rightful Czar will be crowned in Moscow. Gentlemen, I give you the health of Basil, Czar of All the Russias!"

There was a murmur of applause as those around the table, Warden excepted, lifted their glasses. Then Dominetti went on, having accomplished his dramatic gesture.

"We have certain proposals to lay before you, gentlemen; you have certain proposals to lay before us. The *pourparlers* are ended—we have come to the point of definite agreement. Will your highness kindly state in concrete fashion how you propose to act?"

GRAND DUKE BASIL rose, and while every man there knew that he was but the mouthpiece of Dominetti, none the less his stately manner and words were impressive.

"I propose," he said simply, "to act. Behind me are my party, the exiled patriots of Russia. We have ample funds. At this moment we are gathering, in Germany and Poland, thousands of men—old soldiers of the Imperial armies. I propose to march directly upon Moscow, attacking Russia from the west."

"Without the consent of Germany?" murmured Emile Marconnet in his sardonic fashion.

Baron von Federn rose and bowed.

"With the consent, approval, and aid of Germany," said the dry, precise Prussian voice. "With munitions and war supplies furnished by Germany. With two army corps of German veterans as the nucleus of the army, and with five thousand German ex-officers to assist the work. The German general staff has worked out complete plans of campaign."

Von Federn bowed and sat down; his concise words had electrified the assemblage. At this moment Glazunoff entered the room and took the one vacant chair at the table. The gaze of Dominetti rested upon him briefly, whereupon he responded with a slight gesture.

"Come!" Emile Marconnet, without rising, leaned forward and shook a finger at Basil. "You talk well; but before we go farther, let us be practical. You have not the backing of the Imperial party—it is divided. There is that handsome dreamer, that proud weakling, Sergei, to consider. If you start your work with dissension behind you, then you must fail."

Glazunoff handed a folded paper to Grand Duke Basil, who glanced at it, flushed with triumph, and passed it to the nearest man.

"M. Marconnet, this document answers your objection. It is the un-

qualified abdication of Sergei Romanoff; he withdraws from any political pretensions, and urges his followers to join my faithful party."

There was a sharp intake of breath about the table. Yamanaka gave Dominetti a covert glance of admiration. The Japanese diplomat knew who had obtained this abdication.

For five minutes more the document was discussed, read over, handled. But Jimmy Warden sat in crushed futility. The worst was true. Sergei's yellow streak was no ruse, after all. Solomon's great dream had gone down in ruin, smashed by the very man he was raising to power!

Dominetti rose. "It is understood," he said suavely, "that even with German help, your highness might be unable to cope with the vast man-power of Russia, whose Red armies have attained enormous proportions. Therefore, since it is to the interest of all civilized peoples that the Russian Empire be restored to normal conditions, I desire to lay before you certain help which is offered our party. I believe that Baron Yamanaka has a proposition to set before us."

THE little Japanese rose and beamed around.

"I do not speak officially, *messieurs*," he said, "but I have reason to believe that Japan would be very glad to undertake action against the present Russian government, which has caused my country great trouble. With a notice of thirty days, we could move one hundred thousand men out of Manchuria against the Siberian provinces, striking directly inland. At the same time, our fleet would occupy Vladivostok. Within three weeks all of Siberia would be paralyzed or in our hands."

"Excellent!" Dominetti exclaimed, glancing at Fakri Pasha.

The Turk rose and swept the table with a half hostile, half proud look.

"Angora has not been idle since the Greeks were kicked out of Asia," he said in guttural tones. "We are ready, gentlemen. The French must be thrown out of Syria, the British out of Irak. However, we prefer to deal with our foes one at a time. I propose that instead of turning against the French the forces we have prepared, we move at an agreed date against the Crimea and the Baku oil fields. Thus, while Japan attacks on the east and Grand Duke Basil on the west, we shall deliver a vigorous blow from the south."

"And what if France withdraws from Syria, eh?" the Frenchman demanded. "What if she obtains the consent of the League to turn over her mandate to the English, eh? Bah! We have no business in that country. Good! France withdraws; I answer for it. But, about the Russian loans and bonds which have been repudiated by the Soviet Government—eh? Come, your highness! What about them?"

There was an instant of silence.

Warden could not but perceive the perfect manner in which Dominetti's scheme was fitting together. The repudiation of the Russian loans had caused suffering throughout France, the small bonds being held by uncounted thousands of Frenchmen. If Basil were to assume payment, then nothing could keep France from backing him. If Emile Marconnet were the agent of this assumption, then Marconnet would be the next prime minister of France.

"The first act of my government," Basil answered, "will be to assume repayment of these obligations."

"I am satisfied," said Marconnet simply, and emptied his wine-glass.

"But I am not," said Baron Yamanaka, rising to his feet. "Gentlemen, I understand that there is a movement counter to ours afoot, inspired by Italy, whose chief agent here is a man by the name of Solomon. Signor Dominetti, I should like to ask about this."

"So should I," put in Fakri Pasha, glowering across the table. "We know that man in Turkey. The devil himself were a better foe to have! What about him?"

Dominetti's inflexible eyes, his dominant, icy personality, held them all silent and intent. And suddenly Warden perceived more strongly than ever that it was Dominetti who was the motive power here, the force behind this whole vast scheme to change the face of the world. This Italian exile, by his genius, had welded together adverse forces, had planned out every move in his gigantic game of chess. Upon him the whole thing depended.

"TO-MORROW noon, gentlemen," said Dominetti slowly, "we shall meet here to draw up the agreements and conclude our plans. I shall then present to you the signature of this man Solomon—his signature to an agreement placing five millions of dollars in our campaign fund, and binding him to leave France within twenty-four hours."

"How do you know?" demanded Fakri Pasha bluntly.

"I know," said Dominetti, "because at seven o'clock to-night he is sending his chief agent to me asking for terms—capitulating. Are you satisfied?"

Warden smiled ironically. Solomon capitulating, indeed! Dominetti would find himself neatly fooled there.

They were satisfied, however. And now began a discussion of terms, of a thousand involved details, taken up unhurriedly, coldly—a bargaining across the board which went on while the afternoon fled and the daylight died.

Of them all, Dominetti alone had nothing to ask; which meant that he had reached some private agreement with Basil for his own ends. Basil, indeed, was not holding out on terms with any one. Japan, Turkey, France—all had their will of him, and his promises were unhesitant. If he ever attained the Russian throne, thought Warden, Russia would be a smaller empire than it had been these two hundred years.

Sandwiches and coffee were served, and a huge samovar of tea. It was well after six when the company began to break up. Warden had sat silent, listening, appeasing his hunger while the others talked.

At six thirty only Grand Duke Basil and his Russian friends remained, talking loudly with Glazunoff, settling details. Then the others took their departure, and Basil, with Dominetti, Glazunoff and Warden, adjourned to the salon.

It was only now that Warden, with a start, realized that all this while Dominetti had made no mention to the others of the death ray—of that amazing and fearful apparatus whose secret was his alone, now that Pearson was dead.

Precisely at seven o'clock North was brought into the salon.

Warden felt his heart sink. North looked at him, nodded slightly; but the iron-hard features were set, desperate, pale.

"Well?" asked Dominetti, tense for all his control. "You have a message from Solomon?"

"Yes," said North, equally curt. "We are beaten. Solomon has sent me to ask what terms you will grant him."

CHAPTER XVII.

TO THE VICTOR, THE SPOILS!

WARDEN sat there, stunned. All his house of cards had fallen down around him; hopes, efforts, battling—everything had gone down in ruins!

This meeting of men, this game of plotting and wits into which he had almost imperceptibly been drawn, had ended in ghastly reality. He had entered upon it as an actor playing a rôle, and now he saw himself taking too real a part: the part of defeat. Sergei had sold out!

The brains and vision and ability of John Solomon, like those of so many human things, had been vastly overrated. The brains and ruthless efficiency and cruder methods of Dominetti had smashed their way to victory.

Watching North, Warden wondered how the man could take utter disaster so calmly. True, it was the calm of hopelessness, of despair; North was still the man of iron, yet he showed the bitterness of his situation in his features, as he eyed the victors impassively, with never a look for Jimmy Warden.

Those victors, all three of them, accepted victory in their own fashion. Glazunoff was nervous, smoking interminable cigarettes, eyes all ablaze in his pallid face, eagerness straining at the leash within him. Grand Duke Basil poured more liquor, his hand shaking a little. His cruel, handsome, virile countenance was alight, his somber eyes were glowing with strange fires; in this moment he beheld himself the focal point of half the world, the dominant figure of to-morrow's history, with the destiny of nations in the hollow of his long and slender hand.

Dominetti was different—and here he showed the real power in him, the real strength that underlay his nature. No sign of emotion was visible in his high-browed, tapering features. Those light and vivid gray eyes, so startling in contrast with the black hair and swart skin, rested upon North searchingly, almost meditatively—if their great vigor was not increased, neither was it diminished. The man seemed impervious to exultation, even in this moment of triumph.

"So, the great Solomon demands terms!" said Dominetti slowly. "The mysterious is defeated; the incredible is become supplicant to the actual! And you, Mr. North, are the man who was to have destroyed me—and who, instead, begs for my terms! Very well. Where is this Solomon now?"

"At the Hôtel Continental," said North.

Dominetti's brows lifted slightly.

"So! Does he know"—and Dominetti glanced at his wrist watch—"that ten minutes ago his house in Rue Montorgeuil was seized by my men, who are now in possession of it?"

North changed countenance slightly. This was, obviously, news to him—and most unwelcome news, too. His eyes went to Warden for an instant, in appeal, in helpless desperation. But Warden could give him no help here.

The telephone sounded. Dominetti picked up the instrument, and then looked over it at North with a thin smile, as he listened.

"Very good, Mr. Halsey," he said. "She is unhurt? That will be very

pleasant, for you. Kindly place her in a room under guard, as I shall want to ask her a few questions before she is turned over to you. The place was unoccupied? Very well. I shall arrive in a few minutes to inspect it for myself. No, your six men should be plenty."

Dominetti laid down the instrument and lighted a cigarette.

"Suppose you telephone Solomon now, Mr. North," he said calmly. "My terms are very simple. He must meet me there at his house, alone, within twenty minutes, and we shall then settle terms personally."

NORTH, who was very pale, stepped to the desk, then paused.

"Let me—make one appeal," he said uncertainly. "Miss Tully cannot be given to Halsey like a chattel!"

Dominetti silenced him with words of chilled steel.

"You are not dictating what can and cannot be done. I am."

With an effort, North regained control of himself. Jimmy Warden found the eyes of Dominetti upon him, and sat up straighter.

"And you, Mr. Warden," said the voice of steel, "must accept defeat gracefully. Remember that you are acting for Sergei, not for yourself."

"Yes," said Warden.

He saw no hope, nothing to be done here. Afterward, perhaps; at least he could cope with that brute Halsey, if he could not cope with this man of steel!

North was calling the hotel. Then, abruptly, he had Solomon on the wire, and the others watched him, listening in fascination. Dominetti had taken up the extension receiver and was listening in on the conversation.

"He agrees," said North, after repeating the simple message. "He wishes to speak with Warden a moment."

Dominetti nodded, still with that thin, half-amused smile on his lips.

Warden took the instrument from the hand of North.

"Warden speaking," he said. "Solomon?"

"Yes, sir, and werry 'appy I am to 'ear as 'ow you ain't dead."

"Huh! You're happier than I am, maybe," commented Warden with bitterness. "This phone has an extension, remember."

As he spoke, he looked at Dominetti, and met a trace of pleased admiration in those gray eyes.

"That don't signify, sir. I ain't got nothing to say as can't be 'eard by anybody, as the old gent said when 'e was courting of 'is third. We're beat, that's all there is to it, just like that. This 'ere Dominetti is too much for me, and I ain't as young as I was, sir. I just wanted to ask if you'd be so good as to stand by me, sir, you and Mr. North both, when 'im and me meet. You won't 'old it against me, sir—being beat like this 'ere?"

"Nonsense! Of course we don't," Warden replied, a trifle impatiently. "If we've lost the fight, we've lost it."

"Yes, sir," said Solomon's wheezy accents. "And being sorry for yourself ain't a bit o' use, I says. Werry good, Mr. Warden. If you and Mr. North will stand by me, we'll see it through together. That's all, sir."

Warden set down the instrument, with a half-pitying smile as he looked at North.

"All broken up," he said curtly. "Wants to know if we'll stand by him to the finish. Poor chap! I expect he takes it hard."

Grand Duke Basil broke into hearty

laughter. Glazunoff smiled, and even Dominetti indulged in a chuckle. He, too, had listened to Solomon's half-broken words. But Warden caught a swiftly repressed glow in the eyes of North—a flame that startled him beyond measure, inexplicably. North had received some message there. What was it?

DOMINETTI rose. "We'll let Mr. Warden and Mr. North stand by their chief in the moment of disaster, gentlemen! By all means. I'll have another bit of news for Solomon," he added slowly, "and also for Mr. Warden, which will cap our victory, I trust. Eh, your highness?"

He looked at Basil, and the Grand Duke laughed and nodded.

Something in that laugh, something in the acid voice of Dominetti, struck Warden cold. What did they mean? However, he had no opportunity to seek further. Dominetti turned to Glazunoff.

"By the way, Boris, good news for you. Halsey says that he found some sort of machine there, completely installed, with electrical connections; a notebook beside it with Pearson's name on the cover. Do you want to come along? It looks as though—"

Glazunoff bounded to his feet.

"Splendid!" he cried out exultantly, his pallid features all gleaming with joy. "The machine! Solomon installed one there. You recall—a huge box was taken from the laboratory to Rue Montorgeuil? Undoubtedly this was it. Eureka! We don't need to mourn Matsura now! I can handle it, certainly!"

"Very well," said Dominetti, and waved his hand at the grand duke. "Congratulations, my dear Basil! You shall still have the machine of death to serve you! Shall you accompany us?"

The Grand Duke stood up. "I think not," he answered, and lifted his glass. "To the success of our plan, gentlemen!"

He drank his own toast, then bowed and shook hands with Dominetti, who ordered one of the guards at the door to have the grand duke's car ready. Then, when Basil had departed, Dominetti gestured to Glazunoff.

"The Mercedes. Mr. North and Mr. Warden can crowd in with the driver. You and I in back. There is no danger whatever; these gentlemen are too intelligent. Eh, Mr. North?"

"I'm afraid so," said North gloomily. "We're not fools."

"Precisely; as both of you have shown me." Dominetti suddenly gave them both a warm, flashing smile that was almost friendly. "You are beaten, gentlemen; but you have been terrible antagonists, and I salute you. If ever you decide to change flags, get in touch with me. And now, let us go. I shall join you at the car."

Glazunoff had departed. Dominetti walked briskly out of the room. The hats and coats of Warden and North were brought in, and the two men looked at each other silently for one long instant.

"Careful!" said North. "He meant something. Take it literally. Stand beside him."

Warden was scornful in spirit at these words. Solomon, indeed—to be taken literally! As though anything could be expected or hoped for now, when everything was lost, when utter disaster was openly admitted, when terms had been asked, when he himself had found his assumed mission a real one!

"Did June get to the embassy with the treaty?" he asked.

North gave him one look and

shook his head. That look spoke volumes.

As the two men were escorted outside and ushered into the waiting car, Warden remembered Dominetti's baleful hint about "another bit of news." What could that be? Meant not only for Solomon, but for him as well? Some sort of fresh triumph, no doubt, some new disaster; perhaps in regard to the treaty, perhaps not. Well, no matter! The game was lost.

Only one thing remained: June Tully. Dominetti was bound, obviously enough, to turn her over to Halsey.

"And for her sake I must get out of this with a whole skin, somehow," thought Jimmy Warden. "Now it's only a question of preserving my neck. Once away, I'll go after Halsey on my own—and I'll settle the scoundrel this time!"

THE prospect was satisfying; but, as the big Mercedes hummed through the drizzle of rain, Mr. Warden could not see any immediate assurance of its fulfillment.

On the other hand, he could see where Dominetti would make a huge clean-up inside of three days—the publication of that treaty would cause a tremendous crash in French stocks, which Dominetti would have sold short. To Warden, this was the keenest blow of all. The instant that document was made public, the United States would become a target for the scorn and fury of half Europe. Had he only kept it himself—well, what use to mourn? The game was lost. Sergei had given up; Solomon had capitulated.

If North had, as Warden suspected, any lingering hopes as to Solomon's activity, they were destined to be very speedily set at rest.

When the Mercedes drew up before the bronze gates of the house in Rue Montorgeuil, they stood open, and Halsey appeared at once, beckoning the car into the courtyard. As it passed inside, the gates clanged shut again. Halsey held open the car door. He was quite himself now—the glare of floodlights illuminating the courtyard showed the unconcealed triumph in his face.

"I'm expecting Solomon to come here at any minute," said Dominetti sharply, on alighting. "He hasn't arrived?"

"I only wish he would!" Halsey snarled.

"Good! Have him brought to me immediately when he comes. Two men on guard at the gates, the others scattered about the house. You yourself keep an eye on North and Warden, here; the chauffeur can do that, too. Any new developments?"

"Yes," said Halsey with a smile. "Come inside."

They entered the reception salon, the chauffeur removing cap and coat and following them, pistol in hand. Dominetti threw one swift glance about the magnificently furnished room, then turned and stared incredulously at an object Halsey was handing him. Warden gave North a look, and received a helpless shrug in return.

It was the morocco-bound copy of the treaty!

"Eh?" The face of Dominetti drew into taut lines, his eyes fairly blazed at Halsey. "Where did this come from?"

"Your friend Miss Tully had it," and Halsey laughed complacently.

"So!" Dominetti turned, whirled on Warden, regarded him with cruel exultation. "I see! Your messenger did not take this to the embassy after all, eh? My poor friend, you have lost out

—how do you say?—all along the line. And you have nothing to say about it?"

"Why say anything?" returned Warden stolidly. "It's immaterial now. The war's ended."

"Right!" Dominetti pocketed the document, laughing slightly.

Glazunoff intervened with ill-suppressed eagerness.

"Well, do your talking if you like, but let's have a look at that apparatus, Halsey."

"Follow on." Halsey waved his hand. "Yonder is Solomon's private office—plenty of records and interesting documents on file, it seems. They'll give you a pleasant hour or two, Signor Dominetti!"

HALSEY led them through the corridor into another portion of the house which was new to Warden. As they followed, Warden touched North's arm; for the moment they could speak without being heard, as Dominetti was in advance with Halsey.

"Too bad! She should have delivered that treaty!"

"Not a chance," murmured North. "Saw John yesterday morning. He looked it over, said it was of no interest, and told me to take her here and await word from him. I found the gates and everything wide open."

"My heavens!" muttered Warden. "The man's gone stark, staring mad, North!"

Probably North was of the same opinion, for he merely shrugged and made no response. Beyond a doubt, thought Warden, John Solomon was out of his head. The destruction of his organization, of all his plans, must have floored him completely.

Now, with no little pride and triumph, Halsey swung open a door and they passed into a strange room, lighted by a huge crystal chandelier. Not a stick of furniture was in the room, and the floor was bare. Against one blank wall, near the door, hung a gorgeous old Chinese rug of rich gold and blue—a rug at least ten by twelve feet in size. Opposite this wall were windows, uncurtained.

To the right was a long empty wall; in the center of this wall had been a doorway, which was now bricked up; the bricks and mortar were fresh and unplastered as though the job had been done recently and left unfinished.

Opposite this bricked-up doorway, against the fourth wall of the room, was a complicated array of machinery—or rather, a series of machines——connected with the wall by an electric cord which passed to a switch and plug.

Glazunoff advanced upon it eagerly. Dominetti turned to North and Warden—behind whom, at the door, waited the chauffeur, pistol in hand.

"Do you know what this machine is?" asked Dominetti.

North shook his head.

"Never saw it before," said Warden curiously, and so evidently was he telling the truth that Dominetti turned to watch Glazunoff, whom Halsey had joined. Immediately afterward Warden recalled that immense packing-case which he had seen unloaded in the courtyard, and surmised that the machine had arrived in it.

"Looks like a combination of X-rays and ultra-violet light," said Halsey lightly.

Boris Glazunoff, examining the mechanism, sniffed silently for a moment. Then he turned to Dominetti.

"I can't quite make it out," he said, his eyes glowing. "But we've got it,

no doubt about that!" He touched the large apparatus at one end, which was connected with two other instruments, not unlike cameras in appearance, by a long tube of crystal or fused quartz. "This must be Pearson's experimental apparatus—here's the aperture for the passage of the ultra-sonic wave, and here's a test tube still containing some sort of blood—you see the microscope mounted here at the side to observe what passes in the test tube? Yes, this must be P e a r s o n ' s perfected machine!"

"We'll find out," said Dominetti, looking at the apparatus curiously.

"Right," Glazunoff replied. "It 'll take ten minutes or so to get the tubes heated up—perhaps longer. I'll give you a demonstration of something you never saw before!"

GLAZUNOFF went to the switch, connected it, stood back. Instantly there was a faint, insistent humming sound, which quieted down to an imperceptible drone; through the long quartz tube began to play a faint greenish light.

Dominetti looked at Halsey.

"Where is that American girl?"

"Locked in her room, upstairs," said Halsey, and his eyes went to Warden s a r d o n i c a l l y. "She's safe enough."

"I'll question her later, then." Dominetti checked his words, and across his face flitted an expression of astonishment.

Warden turned. Stepping past the guard at the doorway, coming placidly into the room, was John Solomon. The startled chauffeur had lifted his pistol, but Dominetti's gesture caused him to lower it.

There was no menace in that pudgy little figure. It was grotesque enough, and to Warden was rather pathetic. Solomon wore his Basque *béret,* and his two hands were busily carving tobacco from his black plug into the old clay pipe. His round features were quite blank, devoid of expression; his mild blue eyes ignored every one else, to rest upon Dominetti with a species of pleading, apologetic in their humility.

Warden suddenly felt ashamed of his presence at such a scene.

"Good evening, Mr. Dominetti, sir," said Solomon. He came to a halt just in front of the Chinese rug hanging on the wall. "Werry 'appy I am to see you 'ere, sir, you and your friends both. You and me, sir, 'as 'ad a lot o' conflict, and we've done each other a mortal lot o' damage—but now it's ended, and a werry good thing, too, says I. There ain't nothing like ending of a thing shipshape and proper, as the old gent said when 'e fired the 'ousemaid. And I 'opes you says the same, sir."

Warden had a comical feeling, for an instant, that these words were ambiguous—that it was Solomon, not Dominetti, who was here to dictate terms. Then the feeling vanished at once.

"How the devil did you get here?" snapped Dominetti.

"Why, sir," and the blue eyes met his gaze blankly, "I just stepped in, so to speak."

"Hm!" Dominetti surveyed him with interest and a trace of contempt. "You run true to form, eh? Just like all the English—as soon as you kick them hard, they kneel down and lick your boots! Well, you're prepared to receive my terms, are you?"

"Yes, sir," said Solomon mildly. He pocketed his knife and plug, and tamped down his pipe. "If so be as

you 'ave a match to spare, Mr. Warden, we'll 'ear what's to be done in a bit o' comfort. It's wonderful what 'elp a taste o' baccy can be, sir!"

Warden recollected his instructions. He moved over to Solomon's side, handed him a box of matches, and North joined him. The three of them stood facing Dominetti, who was closest to them. The chauffeur-guard stood at the entrance. Halsey stood near Glazunoff, who, after a brief inspection of Solomon, had turned again to the apparatus.

"So you know your house of cards has collapsed, eh?" Dominetti flung at him, half sneeringly. "You and Mussolini—bah! Warden, here, is negotiating on behalf of Sergei; you know that Sergei has given up his fine dreams, do you?"

"Yes, sir, I expect 'e 'as," said Solomon, with a wheezy sigh.

"There's something else you don't know, then," and the singular gray eyes of Dominetti were fairly alive with energy. He gestured. A man who had appeared at the door came forward and handed him a bit of paper, then departed. Dominetti, smiling, opened the paper, read a line of writing there, and crumpled it up. His gaze, with a trace of exultation, went again to Solomon.

"Ten minutes ago," he said calmly, "Prince Sergei was found dead in his hotel room."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FINAL CRASH.

THERE was no doubting the words; that air of quiet assurance told its own story. Dominetti's agents had struck their final blow, and their deadliest one. At the words, Solomon blinked, then a trace of agitation showed in his face.

"Dang it! You've went an' done it," he said tremulously. "Murdered 'im!"

Dominetti shrugged lightly, and got out a cigarette case.

"What do you expect?" he retorted. "Well, so much for your fine little plot, Solomon. It's finished. You're smashed. And you're in my hands now, to boot; you and the two chief agents left to you—for don't think you've fooled me. I know very well that Warden's your man, and you planted him to represent Sergei. And the terms are mine to dictate."

Warden felt a singular sense of futility, of helplessness. So Dominetti knew or guessed the truth; had again been playing him along for a sucker!

This also explained the trick in the Sergei negotiations. Dominetti had been willing to promise anything, had made Basil and the others promise anything, in order to get Sergei's abdication—knowing that their promises would never become public, while Sergei's abdication was already given to the press—or would be given in the morning.

Solomon was obviously hard hit by this news. He struck a match and held it to his pipe with trembling fingers.

"Yes, sir," he said apologetically. "No doubt about it, sir—'ere I be, just like that, and no 'elp for it, neither, as the old gent said when 'e buried 'is third. And what might be your terms, sir?"

Dominetti eyed him with those inflexible gray eyes.

"Before you leave this house, Solomon," the words came with careful deliberation, "you are to place one million pounds to the credit of Grand Duke Basil at the National City Bank,

or Barclays. I understand you've leased this house; I want the lease assigned to me. I want an agreement from you to leave France within two days. That is all."

"All, sir?" echoed Solomon blankly. His surprise was not assumed.

"Yes, all. Think I care about killing you? Bah! I kill those who are dangerous—those who serve you, but not you—poor little old Englishman! Live out your life, broken and smashed—fool that you were, to set yourself up against me! Well, what about my terms? Do they suit you?"

Solomon puffed placidly at his pipe for an instant.

"Yes, sir, they're werry good, and not so 'ard, neither," he admitted. "What about Mr. North and Mr. Warden 'ere? You ain't a goin' to 'urt them, nor Miss Tully?"

"I've already offered them jobs," said Dominetti. "As for Miss Tully, she does not enter into the matter. We'll not discuss her."

"No, sir," said Solomon, to the disgusted astonishment of Warden. The pudgy little man fumbled in his pocket, with a worried air, and produced a small red-covered notebook. "If so be as you'll look over this 'ere statement of accounts, Mr. Dominetti," he said humbly, "I'd be werry glad. I try to keep me accounts in order, sir; I 'aven't 'ad time to enter up poor Prince Sergei, but you'll find everything else shipshape."

He handed the red notebook to Dominetti.

DOMINETTI took the notebook with an amused air. Before he could open it, a sharp exclamation broke from Halsey.

"What's wrong, Boris? Good God, man! Look at him, Dominetti!"

Glazunoff, standing watching the apparatus, turned to meet their gaze. The quartz tube, its quicksilver spluttering in white fire, was sending off a strange and unearthly light, but it was not the light which made Glazunoff look so singular. His eyes were distended, and his face was dark with suffused blood.

"Nothing's wrong," he said irritably. "This thing is superb, magnificent! I'll show you something in a few minutes, Dominetti—I'm just getting the hang of it now. Marvelous! Is this Pearson's machine, Solomon?"

"Yes, sir," returned Solomon, looking a trifle agitated. "I ain't werry certain about it me own self, sir—Mr. Pearson, 'e never 'ad no chance to work it."

"I'll do that for him," and Glazunoff laughed.

The laugh had a strange shrill note which drew Warden's eyes for a moment. Excitement, perhaps, had caused the change in the man—then, looking at Halsey, Warden started slightly.

Halsey, too, had that odd expression—distended eyes, suffused features—and was lighting a cigarette with strange, jerky motions, as though all the blood in his body were in violent movement. The thing was indescribable, yet distinctly horrible to see—and might have been only imagination.

Dominetti apparently saw nothing wrong, for now he stepped back beneath the great crystal chandelier, close to Halsey, for better light by which to examine the little notebook.

Afterward, Jimmy Warden wondered whether that entire scene had been plotted out in the brain of Solomon—whether that very backward step of Dominetti's had been in the mind of the little cockney.

The Italian held up the notebook,

opened it, scanned one page and then another. His air of amused contempt quickened into undisguised interest; then it passed into slowly gathering anger.

A low oath broke from his lips.

He turned another page, glanced at it—and then, exploding in sudden passionate fury, he dashed down the little book to the floor and flung a frightful, inarticulate cry at Solomon, the cry of a wild beast who finds himself trapped beyond escape.

Then, abruptly, he calmed himself; but the gray eyes were lurid with baleful fires.

"You fool!" he said slowly.

Solomon sighed wheezily.

"Yes, sir, just like that. It's a werry good play, Mr. Dominetti, to let the other chap do the 'itting—to let 'im 'it 'ard, so to speak."

Dominetti looked incredulous, amazed. "But—you're a fool!" he cried out. "You can't mean that—it's impossible!"

"Lots o' men are fools, sir," said Solomon, the blue eyes quite blank. "And it ain't a 'alf bad notion, neither."

AN exclamation from Glazunoff broke in upon them.

"Dominetti!" he cried. "Look here! Come here, look! You can see the protoplasm disintegrating before your eyes—"

Glazunoff, gesturing to the microscope beside the apparatus, looked like a madman. His face was a queer purplish black—perhaps due to the spluttering glare of the quartz tube at his elbow.

"Yes, sir, just like that," said Solomon in a low but piercing voice that held them all spellbound. "And if there was another machine like this 'ere, pointed at a man, you'd see 'is blood corpuscles boilin' and disintegratin', too. If there was a false brick in that 'ere doorway across the room, and a machine was sending of a sound-beam—"

Warden was the only one who thought to glance at the bricked-up doorway, and he barely repressed a startled cry. One of the bricks had vanished, in the center of the new work.

"Shut up, Boris!" exclaimed Dominetti, as Glazunoff tried to urge him toward the apparatus. "Solomon, what do you mean by this nonsense?"

"I means, sir," said Solomon placidly, "as 'ow you're beat—just like that. All around the clock, so to speak. That 'ere treaty you forged, for one thing. It's a werry smart bit o' work, but it won't never come to light, sir. 'Cause why, your whole blessed game has gone to smash, just like that. An hour ago Inspector Leblanc was arrested and coughed up all 'e knew. At this werry minute, the police are occupyin' of your 'ouse-in Boulogne. To-night Baron Yamanaka is being ordered 'ome by 'is government. So is Fakri."

"You're mad!" screamed Dominetti, and turned furiously toward the man at the doorway. The Italian's features, like those of Glazunoff and the watching, frowning Halsey, were a queer dark color. "Here, you—shoot this fool!"

The chauffeur lifted his pistol. At this instant, from other parts of the house, came the reverberant sound of heavy shots. As the pistol swung up, an unseen weapon smashed out its report. The chauffeur swung around, fell heavily. In the doorway where he had stood, came an Arab, white-clad, smoking automatic in hand.

"Good Heavens!" A sudden wild and horrible scream broke from Hal-

sey. "You heard what he said—what's wrong with us? Let me out of here—quick, quick—"

Halsey took a step forward.

Too late!

He reeled, clutched at Glazunoff, who was supporting himself against the apparatus, staring at Solomon from horrified, distended eyes. The arms of Glazunoff gave way; he and Halsey both fell limply against the machine, and their bodies slithered to the floor.

Then Warden saw a fearful and incredible thing. Glazunoff had fallen with one arm far outstretched. As Warden looked at it, the fingers of his hand vanished. The hand itself began to vanish. The hand, wrist, arm—

For an instant Warden lost his head. Horror seized upon him, wild blind panic. All these things had taken place in the fraction of a moment. Warden did not realize what he was doing until he found himself in the doorway, struggling to get out of this room, away, anywhere! Then, as the Arab caught his arm, he glanced back.

He had a glimpse of Dominetti standing there, motionless, speechless. In the man's face was a look beyond words, a look of such utter terror, of such horrible fear and agony, that it remained planted in the brain of Warden till his dying day. Then he turned and broke—fled out of the room, came to a halt in the corridor beyond, weak and trembling.

"Werry good, Dr. Lee," said Solomon, puffing unmoved at his pipe. "Cut 'er off, just like that. Mr. North, I expect as 'ow—"

BUT North had fainted—iron man that he was, he could not look upon what was passing in the hall where Dominetti had just crashed to the floor—disintegrating in the midst of his shattered schemes for world conquest!

Solomon motioned to the Arab, who caught hold of North and dragged him out. Then Solomon himself turned and left the room, and walked over to where Warden stood in the corridor.

"Well, sir?" he said, with a wheezy chuckle.

Warden turned away.

"Never mind talking now, John," he said. "I—I'm sick."

An Arab appeared, and saluted.

"Solomon Effendi! We have them all. Four are dead. The others live."

"Very good," said Solomon in French. "Kill the others, place them all in this room. Bring in the acids and bombs from the secret passage. In ten minutes, you will be the last man here; in fifteen minutes, fire the bombs and get away."

Dr. Lee, who had come in time to hear these instructions, caught at the arm of Solomon.

"Stop, stop!" he cried, his saffron features convulsed. "Are you mad? Would you destroy this house—these things here—this apparatus which is a marvel of scientific—"

Solomon knocked out his clay pipe and pocketed it, quite unmoved.

"Dr. Lee," he said calmly, "you 'ave the secret of this 'ere ultra-sonic wave. Others 'ave it likewise. If so be as you want to go ahead with it, go on. But what's in this 'ere 'ouse belongs to me, sir, as the old gent said when 'e caught the butler a kissing of the 'ousemaid. I'll 'ave no truck wi' this 'ere devilish contrivance, you 'ear me?"

Sudden passion shook the voice of Solomon, and for once his face was swept by something very like horror and repulsion, and his placid blue eyes blazed out.

"I'm done with it!" he cried. "I'm done with all this 'ere scientific deviltry, that's what! I'm a goin' back to simple things, just like that—I'm a goin' to Egypt, and I'm a goin' to stay there the rest o' me days! You get out, Dr. Lee—just like that. Get out, and get out quick! Mr. Warden, you 'op upstairs and get Miss Tully, and you get out, too. Fetch 'er down to the 'Otel Continental, sir—I 'ave a suite there."

And, stamping away down the corridor, Solomon was lost to sight, muttering something very like oaths to himself.

Just what happened next, Jimmy Warden never knew exactly. He had a dazed memory of two Arabs guiding him, helping him break down a locked door, of June Tully rushing into his arms. He did not come clearly to himself until he found the two of them standing on a street corner, waving to a cruising taxicab.

A medley of throngs around, of confused cries, wakened him. People were running toward a spouting blaze somewhere back in Rue Montorgeuil. A company of firemen, their brass helmets glittering in the street lights, went clattering and roaring past. Then he was pushing June Tully into the cab and following her.

"Hotel Continental," he directed.

"Oh, Jimmy!" June's voice came at his ear as he put an arm around her in support, and a slender hand clasped his own firmly, confidingly. "What has happened, Jimmy? Where are we?"

"We're going away from here, damn it!" Warden said savagely. Then, realizing the situation, he drew the girl closer and gazed appealingly into her deep brown eyes. "June, dearest, will you go away with me? Away—the two of us?"

A moment later he rapped on the window.

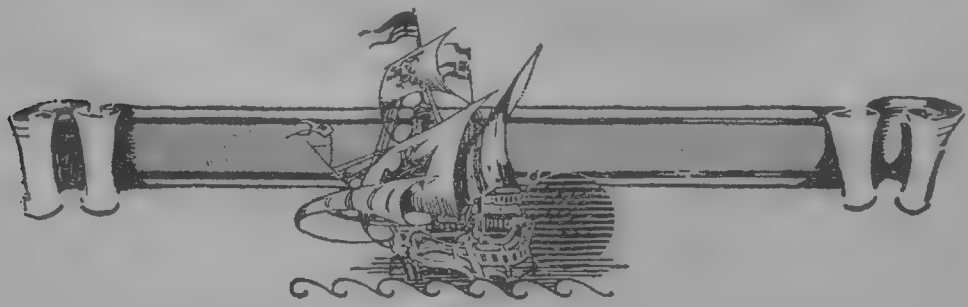
"Don't bother about the Continental," he ordered the chauffeur. "See if you can catch the boat train at the Gare du Nord."

He never saw nor heard of John Solomon again.

THE END.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Readers of the *John Solomon* stories have found brought to completion his amazing world duel with Dominetti. But one particular—the mystery of the little red notebooks—the author may not explain without the express consent of John Solomon himself. What did these notebooks contain—what secret, what astounding proclamation? We cannot say, as yet.

Solomon himself, strangely horrified and repelled by the results of his delving into science, kept his word and went back, with his secrets, to the Eastern lands where he first attained fame and fortune. It is very probable that the startling rumors that have recently come out of the Libyan desert are due to his activities there; and if so, we trust Mr. Bedford-Jones will get in touch with John Solomon and report these matters to our readers.



The Men Who Make The Argosy

CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

Author of "The Raider," "Man-Hunt," "Gone North," etc.

THE vital statistics are: Born in August, 1875, at the village of Janesville, Wisconsin. One year in Wisconsin. Then to Columbus, Ohio, where the educational process was begun, and where after a time I worked at various enterprises, such as newsboy, telegraph messenger, painter, carpenter and manager of the circulation of a newspaper. Spent the better part of five summers and some of the winters in Union County, New Mexico. At twenty I was in Cleveland, Ohio, where I was again a carpenter. Foreman, contractor. Began to write about this time—nights. Thirteen years of writing without finding a publisher. In the interim I was engaged in various enterprises: Building inspector for the City of Cleveland, editor of a small newspaper, expert for the Cuyahoga County Board of Appraisers. Wrote and sold about one hundred short stories. Published a book of short stories called the "Range Riders" in 1911. A success. Followed it with a full length novel called "The Two-Gun Man" in 1911. Another bell-ringer. "Gone North" will be the thirtieth published book. Twenty-three of these have been published as serials in ARGOSY.

I have no regular working hours, but I try my best to turn out at least two full length serials each year. I still make an occasional trip to the West. I like to go over the old ranges. I do not like to have any one refer to Western stories as "wild and woolly," because, while I concede that the West was wild, it never became woolly until the advent of the sheep—and that was after I lived there. I never saw a pair of sheep chaps; I never heard a cowhand call another "cowboy," "cow-puncher" or "waddie." "Hand," or "rider," or "cowhand" was the radius of the terminology as applied to the regular ranch employee. "Straw-boss," "wrangler," "buster," "range-boss" were others—all understandable and universal in the Southwest. To be sure, there were Mexican equivalents used.

I have made some trips into the country which I have written about in "Gone North." Fishing, hunting and observing. My hobbies are hunting, fishing, trap shooting, pistol practice and politics. I have broken ninety-two out of a possible hundred clay targets. In a pistol shoot in competition—with a thirty-eight Colt—at twenty yards I have made a ninety-one and a quarter per cent target.

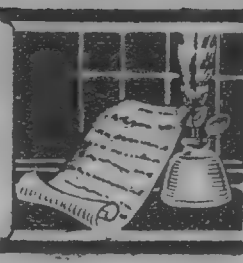
Last November I rang the bell in North Olmsted politics by being elected mayor of the town—and I am now serving my sentence. North Olmsted is a suburban town on the edge of Cleveland and has a population of twenty-five hundred people and by the end of my two-year term I expect they will all join in chasing me out of town.

I have been married thirty-five years. Five children. One girl married, one at home. One boy, Louis B., is editor of the Cleveland *Press;* another, Robert M., is a star reporter; the third is an advertising man. I am grateful that they did not attempt to follow in their father's footsteps.

P. S. My wife still believes in me.

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint



RALPH MILNE FARLEY VINDICATED

HERE is an interesting item for pseudo-scientific fiction fans. The description of the planet Venus, as given by *Myles Standish Cabot*, Ralph Milne Farley's hero of "The Radio Man," published in the ARGOSY in 1924, has just been completely verified by a leading French astrophysicist, Dr. Albert Nodon, as is attested by the following clipping from the Milwaukee *Journal* of February 9, 1930:

SEES VENUS WORLD OF BOILING SEAS

If a human being ever accomplishes in fact the fiction writer's dream of visiting the planet Venus, life for that intrepid space voyager probably will become a mad scramble back and forth across the face of his new world to escape varieties of weather more terrible than any storm or heat wave or tornado ever encountered on earth.

So believes the French astronomer, Dr. Albert Nodon, who has summarized in the Parisian scientific periodical *La Nature* what is known about this sister planet. Dr. Nodon accepts the belief of most astronomers that the atmosphere of Venus carries a continual layer of clouds, through which telescopes catch no glimpse of the real surface. The pressure in this atmosphere probably is no more, he believes, than a third of the air pressure on earth, which would make water boil on Venus at a temperature of only about 130 Fahrenheit, instead of 212.

This fact, plus an average intensity of sunlight about twice that on earth, probably means, Dr. Nodon concludes, that the equatorial regions of Venus are occupied by boiling oceans. The vast quantities of steam thus generated probably rush toward the poles and fall there as almost continual rains, hundreds of times more violent than the heaviest cloudbursts on earth. Because of a probable tilt of the planet's axis, the seasons on Venus are believed to differ far more than summer and winter do on earth, so that Venusian inhabitants, if there are any, may need to migrate twice each year from one pole to the other, much as some birds do on earth. Across the route of this migration would stand, however, the barrier of Dr. Nodon's imagined boiling seas.

ALSO RAY CUMMINGS

RALPH MILNE FARLEY calls to our attention another interesting clipping which adds startling realism to Ray Cummings's lately published story, "The Sea Girl." Mr. Farley's letter follows:

The following clipping, from the January issue of the *Atlantic Fisherman*, came as a distinct shock to me. Can it be that Ray Cummings builded better than he knew, and that we are actually on the verge of a draining of the seas by the forces of Rhana, as described in "The Sea Girl"?

This is the clipping:

"The sinking of the Grand Banks, the fishing banks off the coast of Newfoundland, which has been reported by the cable ships sent out to repair the cables snapped by the earthquake of November 18, is causing grave concern to the Gloucester and Nova Scotia fishermen.

"The preliminary reports from the cable ships indicate that the Gloucester halibut fishermen will have to seek new grounds for their catches when they sail out of their home port. For nearly a century the fishermen have found the expansive Grand Banks the most likely spot in the Atlantic where good catches of halibut could be obtained. The most recent reports sent out by the cable ships indicate that there has been an extensive and serious sinking of the sea's bottom off Newfoundland. If a similar sinking occurred on land a widespread area would be completely devastated. In places where the soundings previous to the earthquake gave a depth of six hundred feet the cable ships report that a sounding of fifteen thousand feet, nearly three miles, is now necessary to reach bottom. Some of the cable ships report that for distances of one hundred miles on the Grand Banks, the cables have disappeared and have

sunk to unknown depths. Before the shock these copper strands were within six hundred feet of the surface. While these cable ships are still making exhaustive soundings, they all have reported that the quake appears to have caved in the bottom of that section of the North Atlantic, thus rendering useless the charts that have been made for this area of water. How extensive this new condition will prove to be no one yet knows.

"The news that the Grand Banks had sunk caused considerable apprehension in Gloucester."

The bottom of the ocean has dropped out for an area one hundred miles square—ten thousand square miles! What can it have dropped into, unless into those subterranean caverns which Cummings so vividly described?

I must confess that it would not surprise me in the least to begin to read soon, in the press, reports of a recession of the ocean levels, the forerunner of *Rhana's* attempt at conquest of the earth.

And while I am on the subject of Cummings, may I go on record as stating that all these criticisms of his "Princess of the Atom" make me tired? That story is Cummings's best, and in my opinion is the most sustained and realistic bit of scientification ever written by any one.

RALPH MILNE FARLEY.

THE SHIP OF ISHTAR

HERE is good news for the many readers who have been trying to secure copies of A. Merritt's great novel "The Ship of Ishtar." For several years we have been unable to supply the back copies containing this story. The book edition of the novel has also been out of print, but we have been fortunate in securing one hundred copies of the book pages, which we are now having bound up in attractive cloth covers.

To those of you who want a copy of "The Ship of Ishtar" we are offering these books, as long as they last, for one dollar a copy. As this small supply will be exhausted rapidly, we can promise only to fill orders as they are received—and as long as the volumes last. If you want a copy of the book send in your order and one dollar to-day. We cannot fill C. O. D. orders.

OTHER ARGOSY NOVELS

THE A. C. McClurg Co., of Chicago, Illinois, have just announced another list of ARGOSY serials which they are publishing in book form this spring. The novels, with their dates of publication, are as follows:

"Maza of the Moon," by Otis Adelbert Kline, March 1.

"The Silver Fang," by George F. Worts, March 15.

"The Mental Marvel," by Fred MacIsaac, March 29.

A REGULAR family paper is ARGOSY in this home:

Chicago, Ill.

Have been reading ARGOSY now for eight years and have yet to lay aside a single week's copy when finished without a feeling of regret that there were not twice as many stories in each issue.

My husband introduced ARGOSY to me when we were first married. We take turns reading to each other, and our little girl who is now seven years old is an ARGOSY fan and can read it, too.

I sincerely hope that you will not let the fault finders disturb you for a moment, for you know that type of person has to let off steam and they pick on the authors, for they know that an author can retaliate with nothing harder than a return letter of indignation.

I enjoy Fred MacIsaac, H. Bedford-Jones, Edgar Franklin, Loring Brent, John H. Thompson, Ray Cummings, Don Waters, Oscar J. Friend, Otis Kline, and if I have slighted any one I am sorry.

Long live ARGOSY and down with the crabbers.

MRS. C. G. B.

SUMMER just stored up winter fun for this reader:

Saginaw, Mich.

I have been a reader of your ARGOSY for several years, but this is the first time I have written you, for I am a much better reader than I am a writer. Every Wednesday I look for your ARGOSY the same as I look for my supper when I come home from work. You have got just the right assortment of stories to please me, and I read everything. Last summer I was too busy to read, but I got my ARGOSY just the same and every evening

this winter has been one glorious time after another. Just keep up the good work and more power to you.

D. D. LOOMIS.

OF course, Fred MacIsaac's "A Great Man's Shoes" went over with a bang!

Toronto, Canada.

Although I have been an interested reader of your magazine for the last ten years I have never before taken the time to write you of my appreciation of ARGOSY.

My favorite author is Fred MacIsaac. "A Great Man's Shoes" certainly was good. I enjoyed it very much.

Ray Cummings is another writer whose stories I like very much. His stories are along the lines of astronomy, something I am very much interested in.

One reason I enjoy ARGOSY is because the stories are different.

The ARGOSY is a good magazine and I congratulate the authors and the editor.

FRED S. WILSON.

Moore, Mont.

Just finished Fred MacIsaac's latest novel, "A Great Man's Shoes," and I want to say that I think it's wonderful.

I notice in "Argonotes" that MacIsaac is a decided favorite. There must be a reason.

I think the ARGOSY is the best story magazine on the market. Keep the good work up.

HARRY EDWARDS.

ANOTHER welcome for *John Solomon:*

Philadelphia, Pa.

It is often quite amusing to read the criticism some of your readers write in. To me a story is either good or not so good, but as for panning the author, nothing doing.

For years I have read letters of your old readers and yet I wonder if any of them have read the ARGOSY as long as I have. I can't give you the dates of the first ones, but suppose we start with the issues just before "Block Tower Seven" was published. Then there were the "Hawkins" stories, and way before them Edgar Franklin wrote the story of the New York millionaire *Manning,* the name of which I forget. I do not believe I missed more than half a dozen issues of *my* magazine in all these years. I was in at the birth of the *All-Story* and the *Cavalier,* but the ARGOSY has always been the best.

Where are the old writers to-day? The new ones are very, very good, but it would surely seem like old times again to see the old names.

I am very glad to see *John Solomon* back, and I sure do get a kick out of *Gillian Hazeltine.* What's the use of saying more? I like 'em all and wish ARGOSY cost twenty cents and was twice as thick in size.

R. T. SHAW.

JUST satisfied—that's all:

Atlanta, Ga.

I have been reading ARGOSY since I was fifteen years old and am twenty-six now. Surely do enjoy the type of stories you have. While in the Navy two years, from 1922 till 1924, I could always depend on some of the gobs having a copy that I could borrow if I couldn't get to a news-stand for one. F. V. Mason's stories can always be depended on for good reading. Also I like H. Bedford-Jones, John H. Thompson, Eustace L. Adams, Fred MacIsaac and John Hopper. A. Leslie's railroading story was exceptionally good in the issue of February 22. I don't see how any one can complain about the ARGOSY as I firmly believe it is the equal of many magazines selling for twenty-five cents or more. In closing, I wish a long life to ARGOSY and all its fine authors.

W. L. GREENE.

ALWAYS there are plenty of these MacIsaac fans:

Hamburg, Pa.

Keep throwing Fred MacIsaac's stories at me, editor. I am a recent ARGOSY fan and I sure do like MacIsaac's stories. Murray Leinster also knows how to spin the crook yarns; his stories are great. Leinster's "City of the Blind" was one of the best stories I've read in a great while. I am greatly impressed by Otis Adelbert Kline's "Maza of the Moon." It is a wonderfully written story. Kline certainly has an imagination. I have just received the first part of "The Plumed Serpent," by Richard Barry, which I am sure will prove interesting reading.

W. H. CALNAN.

OUR latest report is that A. Merritt is just finishing up the sequel to "The Face in the Abyss." So it won't be long now!

New York, N. Y.

I want to congratulate you on the start of two wonderful stories, "Maza of the Moon" and "The Plumed Serpent."

By the way, where is A. Merritt? His "Seven Footprints to Satan" and "Moon Pool" were marvelous. I think Fred MacIsaac is your best author. "Spectral Passenger" and "Mental Marvel" were great.

My favorite authors are: Merritt, Packard, Mason, MacIsaac, O. A. Kline and Richard Barry.

Slater LaMaster's "Phantom in the Rainbow" wasn't what it was supposed to be in "Argonotes." Boy! That new writer Otis Adelbert Kline, is a "pippin." Well, here's luck to ARGOSY.

DAN VOLAN.

AND here a few more modern ones:

Yarmouth, Maine.

Four years ago I picked up an ARGOSY in a laboratory, read a short story by John H. Thompson and have been getting my copy each week ever since.

I can hardly wait for my copy when you announce that a story by MacIsaac is coming; he surely is the star author of your magazine.

I would like to see more of Lieut. John Hopper's stories. His "Yankee Bluff" was a dandy.

I feel sure that stories by F. V. W. Mason, Ralph Perry, J. Allan Dunn, Geo. F. Worts, Hulbert Footner and H. Bedford-Jones will be relished by all readers.

Only one thing wrong with ARGOSY: not enough sport stories. Give us a good football story.

LELAND S. ANDERSON.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

I did not like.....

because.....

Name.....

Street.....

City.....*State*.....

3-22

Looking Ahead!

John Norcross takes the field again to find

The City of Japheth

Another stirring novel of adventure in China, from the pen of

W. WIRT

RALPH R. PERRY
is on hand again with a South Sea Island complete novelette—
Devil Pearls

J. E. GRINSTEAD
gives us a Western story that is packed full of chuckles—
Malt, Vinous, or Poisonous

COMING TO YOU IN THE ARGOSY OF MARCH 29th

On Sale April First!!

DOC PILLSBURY, Butch Poteet, Mrs. Armitage, Mrs. Dupont-Skaggs, and all of the other characters in the famous "Honk and Horace" series, will return to this Magazine with the April issue.

Emmet F. Harte

the noted author, and long-time director of the destinies of this famous team, has written the story of their return. Mr. Harte is at his best in the opening story, and to those who know these characters well, this announcement of the return will get a charitable reception, and need not be received with "open alms."

To those who do not know these characters, there is a treat in store. For a goodly measure of wholesome reading matter, that will interest not only railroaders, but others as well, buy the April and all other issues of

Railroad Man's Magazine

April issue on sale April 1st. 25c at all news-stands.

PUBLISHED BY

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

"COMING EVENTS cast their shadows before"

(Thomas Campbell 1777-1844)

AVOID THAT FUTURE SHADOW

by refraining from over-indulgence

We do not represent that smoking **Lucky Strike** Cigarettes will cause the reduction of flesh. We do declare that when tempted to do yourself too well, if you will "Reach for a **Lucky**" instead, you will thus avoid over-indulgence in things that cause excess weight and, by avoiding over-indulgence, maintain a trim figure.

When Tempted Reach for a LUCKY instead

"It's toasted"

©1930, The American Tobacco Co., Manufacturers